ROMANCE

Tales from McClure's

"WHY NOT?"

Tales from McClure's

ROMANCE

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THE TYPE-WRITTEN LETTER

BY

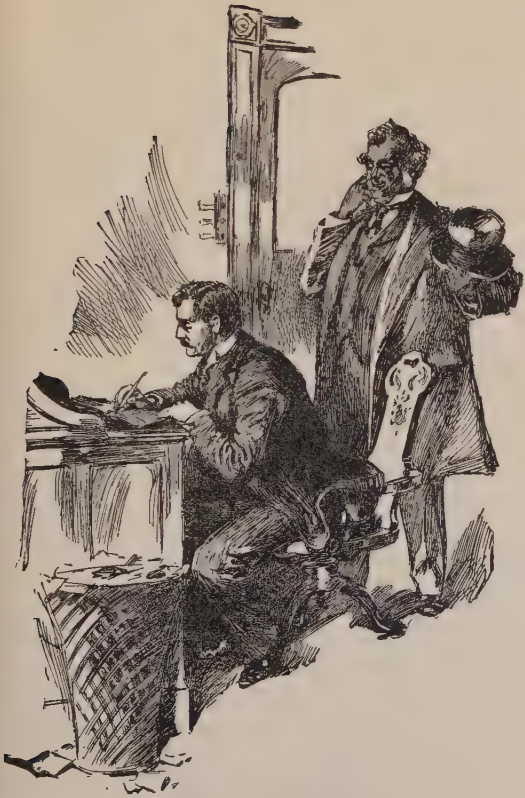
ROBERT BARR

THE TYPE-WRITTEN LETTER

WHEN a man has battled with poverty all his life, fearing it as he fought it, feeling for its skinny throat to throttle it, and yet dreading all the while the coming of the time when it would gain the mastery and throttle him—when such a man is told that he is rich, it might be imagined he would receive the announcement with hilarity. When Richard Denham realized that he was wealthy he became even more sober than usual, and drew a long breath as if he had been running a race and had won it. The man who brought him the news had

no idea he had told Denham anything novel. He merely happened to say, "You are a rich man, Mr. Denham, and will never miss it."

Denham had never before been called a rich man, and up to that moment he had not thought of himself as wealthy. He wrote out the check asked of him, and his visitor departed gratefully, leaving the merchant with something to ponder over. He was as surprised with the suddenness of the thing as if some one had left him a legacy. Yet the money was all of his own accumulating; but his struggle had been so long, and he had been so hopeless about it, that from mere habit he exerted all his energies long after the enemy was overcome—just as the troops at New Orleans fought a fierce battle, not knowing the war was over. He had sprung from such a hopelessly poor family. Poverty had been their inheritance from generation to generation. It was the invariable legacy that father had left to son in the Denham family. All had accepted their lot with uncomplaining resignation, until Richard resolved he would at least have a fight for it.



HE DREW THE CHECK.

And now the fight had been won. Denham sat in his office staring at the dingy wall-paper so long that Rogers, the chief clerk, put his head in and said in a deferential voice:

"Anything more to-night, Mr. Denham?"

Denham started as if that question, in that tone, had not been asked him every night for years.

"What 's that? what 's that?" he cried.

Rogers was astonished, but too well trained to show it.

"Anything more to-night, Mr. Denham?"

"Ah, quite so. No, Rogers, thank you; nothing more."

"Good night, Mr. Denham."

"Eh? Oh, yes; good night, Rogers, good night."

When Mr. Denham left his office and went out into the street, everything had an unusual appearance to him. He walked long, unheeding the direction. He looked at the fine residences, and realized that he might have a fine residence if he wanted it. He saw handsome carriages; he, too, might set

up an equipage. The satisfaction these thoughts produced was brief. Of what use would a fine house or an elegant carriage be to him? He knew no one to invite to the house or to ride with him in the carriage. He began to realize how utterly alone in the world he was. He had no friends—no acquaintances, even. The running dog with its nose to the ground sees nothing of the surrounding scenery. He knew men in a business way, of course, and doubtless each of them had a home in the suburbs somewhere; but he could not take a business man by the shoulders and say to him, "Invite me to your house. I am lonely; I want to know people."

If he got such an invitation he would not know what to do with himself. He was familiar with the counting-room and its language, but the drawing-room was an unexplored country to him, where an unknown tongue was spoken. On the road to wealth he had missed something, and it was now too late to go back for it. Only the day before he had heard one of the clerks, who did not

know he was within ear-shot, allude to him as "the old man." He felt as young as ever he did, but the phrase, so lightly spoken, made him catch his breath.

As he was now walking through the park and away from the busy street, he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his grizzled hair, looking at his hand when he had done so as if the gray, like wet paint, had come off. He thought of a girl he knew once, who perhaps would have married him if he had asked her, as he was tempted to do. But that had always been the mistake of the Denhams. They had all married young, except himself, and so sunk deeper into the mire of poverty, pressed down by a rapidly increasing progeny. The girl had married a baker, he remembered. Yes, that was a long time ago. The clerk was not far wrong when he called him an old man. Suddenly another girl arose before his mental vision—a modern girl, very different indeed to the one who married the baker. She was the only woman in the world with whom he was on speaking terms, and he knew her

merely because her light and nimble fingers played the business sonata of one note on his office type-writer. Miss Gale was pretty, of course,—all type-writer girls are,—and it was generally understood in the office that she belonged to a good family who had come down in the world. Her somewhat independent air deepened this conviction and kept the clerks at a distance. She was a sensible girl, who realized that the type-writer paid better than the piano, and accordingly turned the expertness of her white fingers to the former instrument. Richard Denham sat down upon a park bench. "Why not?" he asked himself. There was no reason against it, except that he felt he had not the courage. Nevertheless he formed a desperate resolution.

Next day business went on as usual. Letters were answered, and the time arrived when Miss Gale came in to see if he had any further commands that day. Denham hesitated. He felt vaguely that a business office was not the proper place for a proposal, yet he knew he would be at a disadvantage any-

where else. In the first place, he had no plausible excuse for calling upon the young woman at home; and in the second place, he knew, if he once got there, he would be stricken dumb. It must either be at his office or nowhere.

"Sit down a moment, Miss Gale," he said at last. "I wanted to consult you about a matter—about a business matter."

Miss Gale seated herself, and automatically placed on her knee the shorthand writing-pad, ready to take down his instructions. She looked up at him expectantly. Denham, in an embarrassed manner, ran his fingers through his hair.

"I am thinking," he began, "of taking a partner. The business is very prosperous now; in fact, it has been so for some time."

"Yes?" said Miss Gale, interrogatively.

"Yes. I think I should have a partner. It is about that I wanted to speak to you."

"Don't you think it would be better to consult with Mr. Rogers? He knows more about business than I. But perhaps it is Mr. Rogers who is to be the partner?"

"No, it is not Rogers. Rogers is a good man. But—it is not Rogers."

"Then I think in an important matter like this Mr. Rogers, or some one who knows the business as thoroughly as he does, would be able to give you advice that would be of some value."

"I don't want advice exactly. I have made up my mind to have a partner, if the partner is willing."

Denham mopped his brow. It was going to be even more difficult than he had anticipated.

"Is it, then, a question of the capital the partner is to bring in?" asked Miss Gale, anxious to help him.

"No, no. I don't wish any capital. I have enough for both. And the business is very prosperous, Miss Gale—and—and has been."

The young woman raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"You surely don't intend to share the profits with a partner who brings no capital into the business?"

"Yes—yes, I do. You see, as I said, I have no need for more capital."

"Oh, if that is the case, I think you should consult Mr. Rogers before you commit yourself."

"But Rogers would n't understand."

"I 'm afraid I don't understand either. It seems to me a foolish thing to do—that is, if you want my advice."

"Oh, yes, I want it. But it is n't as foolish as you think. I should have had a partner long ago. That is where I made the mistake. I 've made up my mind on that."

"Then I don't see that I can be of any use—if your mind is already made up."

"Oh, yes, you can. I 'm a little afraid that my offer may not be accepted."

"It is sure to be, if the man has any sense. No fear of such an offer being refused. Offers like that are not to be had every day. It will be accepted."

"Do you really think so, Miss Gale? I am glad that is your opinion. Now, what I wanted to consult you about is the form of the offer. I would like to put it—well—del

icately, you know, so that it would not be refused, nor give offense."

"I see. You want me to write a letter to him?"

"Exactly, exactly," cried Denham, with some relief. He had not thought of sending a letter before. Now he wondered why he had not thought of it. It was so evidently the best way out of a situation that was extremely disconcerting.

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

"To him? What him?"

"To your future partner, about the proposal?"

"No, no. Oh, no. That is—I have spoken to nobody but you."

"And you are determined not to speak to Mr. Rogers before you write?"

"Certainly not. It 's none of Rogers's business."

"Oh, very well," said Miss Gale, shortly, bending over her writing-pad.

It was evident that her opinion of Denham's wisdom was steadily lowering. Suddenly she looked up.

"How much shall I say the annual profits are? Or do you want that mentioned?"

"I—I don't think I would mention that. You see, I don't wish this arrangement to be carried out on a monetary basis—not altogether."

"On what basis, then?"

"Well—I can hardly say. On a personal basis, perhaps. I rather hope that the person—that my partner—would, you know, like to be associated with me."

"On a friendly basis, do you mean?" asked Miss Gale, mercilessly.

"Certainly. Friendly, of course—and perhaps more than that."

Miss Gale looked up at him with a certain hopelessness of expression.

"Why not write a note inviting your future partner to call upon you here, or anywhere else that would be convenient, and then discuss the matter?"

Denham looked frightened.

"I thought of that, but it would n't do. No; it would n't do. I would much rather settle everything by correspondence."

"I am afraid I shall not be able to compose a letter that will suit you. There seem to be so many difficulties. It is very unusual."

"That is true, and that is why I knew no one but you could help me, Miss Gale. If it pleases you it will please me."

Miss Gale shook her head, but after a few moments she said, "How will this do?

"'DEAR SIR—'"

"Wait a moment," cried Mr. Denham; "that seems rather a formal opening, does n't it? How would it read if you put it 'Dear Friend'?"

"If you wish it so." She crossed out the "Sir" and substituted the word suggested. Then she read the letter:

"'DEAR FRIEND: I have for some time past been desirous of taking a partner, and would be glad if you would consider the question and consent to join me in this business. The business is, and has been for several years, very prosperous, and as I shall require

no capital from you, I think you will find my offer a very advantageous one. I will—'"

"I—I don't think I would put it quite that way," said Denham, with some hesitation. "It reads as if I were offering everything, and that my partner—well, you see what I mean."

"It 's the truth," said Miss Gale, defiantly.

"Better put it on the friendly basis, as you suggested a moment ago."

"I did n't suggest anything, Mr. Denham. Perhaps it would be better if you would dictate the letter exactly as you want it. I knew I could not write one that would please you."

"It does please me, but I 'm thinking of my future partner. You are doing first-rate —better than I could do; but just put it on the friendly basis."

A moment later she read:

"'. . . join me in this business. I make you this offer entirely from a friendly, and not from a financial, standpoint, hoping that

you like me well enough to be associated with me.'

"Anything else, Mr. Denham?"

"No; I think that covers the whole ground. It will look rather short, type-written, won't it? Perhaps you might add something to show that I shall be exceedingly disappointed if my offer is not accepted."

"No fear," said Miss Gale. "I 'll add that, though. 'Yours truly,' or 'Yours very truly'?"

"You might end it 'Your friend.'"

The rapid click of the type-writer was heard for a few moments in the next room, and then Miss Gale came out with the completed letter in her hand.

"Shall I have the boy copy it?" she asked.

"Oh, bless you, no!" answered Mr. Denham, with evident trepidation.

The young woman said to herself, "He does n't want Mr. Rogers to know, and no wonder; it is a most unbusinesslike proposal."

Then she said aloud, "Shall you want me again to-day?"

"No, Miss Gale; and thank you very much."

Next morning Miss Gale came into Mr. Denham's office with a smile on her face.

"You made a funny mistake last night, Mr. Denham," she said as she took off her wraps.

"Did I?" he asked in alarm.

"Yes. You sent that letter to my address. I got it this morning. I opened it, for I thought it was for me, and that perhaps you

did not need me to-day. But I saw at once that you put it in the wrong envelop. Did you want me to-day?"

It was on his tongue to say, "I want you every day," but he merely held out his hand for the letter, and looked at it as if he could not account for its having gone astray.

The next day Miss Gale came late, and she looked frightened. It was evident that Denham was losing his mind. She put the letter down before him and said:

"You addressed that to me the second time, Mr. Denham."

There was a look of haggard anxiety about Denham that gave color to her suspicions. He felt that it was now or never.

"Then why don't you answer it, Miss Gale?" he said gruffly.

She backed away from him.

"Answer it?" she repeated faintly.

"Certainly. If I got a letter twice I would answer it."

"What do you mean?" she cried, with her hand on the door-knob.

"Exactly what the letter says. I want you for my partner. I want to marry you, and—financial considerations—"

"Oh!" cried Miss Gale, in a long-drawn, quivering sigh. She was doubtless shocked at the word he had used, and fled to her type-writing room, closing the door behind her.

Richard Denham paced up and down the floor for a few moments, then rapped lightly at her door; but there was no response. He put on his hat and went out into the street.

After a long and aimless walk he found himself again at his place of business. When he went in Rogers said to him:

"Miss Gale has left, sir."

"Has she?"

"Yes; and she has given notice. Says she is not coming back, sir."

"Very well."

He went into his own room, and found a letter marked "Personal" on his desk. He tore it open, and read in neatly type-written characters:

"I have resigned my place as type-writer girl, having been offered a better situation. I am offered a partnership in the house of Richard Denham. I have decided to accept the position, not so much on account of its financial attractions as because I shall be glad, on a friendly basis, to be associated with the gentleman I have named. Why did you put me to all that worry writing that idiotic letter, when a few words would have saved ever so much bother? You evidently *need* a partner. My mother will be

pleased to meet you any time you call. You have the address.

"Your friend,
"MARGARET GALE."

"Rogers!" shouted Denham, joyfully.

"Yes, sir," answered that estimable man, putting his head into the room.

"Advertise for another type-writer girl, Rogers."

"Yes, sir," said Rogers.

RACHEL

BY

MRS. E. V. WILSON

RACHEL

IT was the middle of a short December afternoon. From the scholars in the little log school-house in the Stillman district rose a buzzing sound as they bent over their desks, intent on books or mischief, as the case might be. The teacher, a good-looking young man of twenty or thereabouts, was busy with a class in arithmetic when a shrill voice called out:

"Teacher, Rachel Stillman 's readin' a story-book."

"Bring the book to me," said the teacher, quietly; and the delinquent, a girl of about fourteen, slowly rose, and walking to him, placed a much-worn volume in his hands.

"Why," he said, glancing at the open page, "it is the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' No wonder you are interested. But you must not read it during school hours."

The child lifted to his face a pair of large blue eyes, beautiful with timid wistfulness, as she replied:

"I know I ought n't, sir, but I wanted to see how they got out of Doubting Castle so bad."

He smiled. "I will give you the book after school; then you can read it at home."

"Oh, no," she whispered; "father won't let me read story-books."

"He surely would not object to this," answered the young teacher; "but I will keep it until recess to-morrow, and, never fear, Christian and Hopeful will outwit the giant yet."

The wistful eyes brightened, and with a grateful smile Rachel returned to her desk.

"First class in spelling, take your places," called the teacher.

Rachel belonged to this class, as did all the larger scholars, among whom was her

brother Thomas, two years her elder. The teacher had promised a prize at the end of the term to the member of the class obtaining the greatest number of head marks, and consequently a good deal of interest was taken in the lessons.

Rachel had been at the head of the class the evening before; therefore she now took her station at its foot. Tom, her brother, now was head, and for some time no change in position was made. But finally "somebody blundered," and Rachel, who was one of the good spellers, went up in the long line. Presently another word was missed, and now Rachel walked to the head. Tom pushed her spitefully.

"Another mark, Rachel," said the teacher, "for that is the end of the lesson."

The class resumed their seats, and, a few minutes after, school was dismissed for the day.

"Good evening," said the teacher, as Rachel and a younger sister, a pretty, delicate child, passed him at the door. "Now, no worrying about Christian, Rachel."

"I won't," she laughed. "I guess he 'll get out. Didn't he stand up to old Apollyon?"

"Like a good fellow," was the reply. "Hope I 'll come off as well."

She looked at him inquiringly; but he had turned toward his desk, and the sisters set out on their half-mile walk home.

Let us precede them and see what manner of home it is to which these children belong.

The farm is a large one, the buildings substantial, and everything has a prosperous, well-to-do look. Mr. Stillman, the owner of these broad acres and the father of these three, Tom, Rachel, and Susy, as well as of three more girls and another stalwart son, is a stout, comfortable-looking man of forty-five or fifty. A glance at his close, thin lips and keen gray eyes would convince an observant person that he would make it very uncomfortable for any one in his power who might differ from him in opinion or dispute his authority. Just now he is chatting pleasantly with his hired man, and pays no attention to the children, who pass him on the way to the house.

Indoors, Mrs. Stillman, a slender, fair-haired woman, who looks as if she felt she owed the world an apology for living in it, is preparing supper, assisted by her two daughters, Elizabeth, a sad-faced woman of twenty-four, and Margaret, a girl of eighteen, with her father's determined mouth and chin and her mother's large blue eyes and fair hair. The clock struck five as the school-girls entered the kitchen, a large room which in winter did duty as dining-room as well as cooking-room.

"Run in the sitting-room, girls, and get warm," said the mother. "Supper is almost ready."

"Oh, we're not cold; are we, Susy? I got another head mark, mother," said Rachel.

The mother smiled. "I hope you or Tom will get the prize. Where is he?" She was interrupted by a stamping of feet as the door was thrown open, and Mr. Stillman, followed by the hired man and Tom, entered the room.

"Supper is ready," said Mrs. Stillman. "We were just going to call you."

"Well, I guess it will keep till we 're ready," answered her husband, roughly. "Rachel, get some water; the bucket 's empty, of course. Margaret, where 's the wash-basin? Nothing in its place, as usual. Pity there was n't two or three more girls lazyin' around!"

Nobody replied to this tirade. The hired man picked up the basin, Margaret handed a towel, Rachel brought the water, and soon the family were gathered around the well-spread table.

"I tell you," said Mr. Stillman, after a few mouthfuls of the savory food had apparently put him in a better humor, "I think we'll have fine weather for hog-killin' next week, and I never did have a finer lot of hogs."

"Oh, father," said Margaret, "don't butcher next week. Friday is Christmas day and—"

"Christmas!" interrupted her father. "Well, we always butcher Christmas week, don't we?"

"Yes, I know," she said, her lips trembling in spite of her effort to control herself.

"But we never have enjoyed the holidays, and I thought maybe this year you—"

"We will do this year as we always have," broke in the father, angrily. "I suppose"—with a look at his wife, from which she shrank as from a blow—"this is one of your plans to have your girls gadding over the country."

"Mother never said anything about it," said Margaret, her temper getting the better of her; "but nobody else takes Christmas-times to do their hardest and dirtiest work."

"Will you hush?" thundered the father. "What do I care what anybody else does? I am master here."

No one spoke again. The assertion could not be denied. He was master, and well his wife and daughters knew it.

Poor Mrs. Stillman! Two fortunate baby girls had died a few weeks after their birth, and the tears that fell over the little coffins were not half so bitter as those she shed when first she held their innocent faces to her heart. When on this evening the father had shown his authority, the two elder daugh-

ters rose from the table, and taking a couple of large buckets, went quietly out to the barn-yard, and proceeded to milk the half-dozen cows awaiting them.

It was nearly dark and very cold; but no word was spoken, except to the animals, as the girls hurried through the work, and hastened back to the kitchen, where Rachel and the mother were clearing away the supper-table and making the needful preparations for the early breakfast.

When all was finished, the mother and daughters entered the large room adjoining the kitchen, which served as sitting-room for the family and bedroom for the parents, Mr. Stillman not permitting a fire kept in any other room in the house. Mrs. Stillman sat down with her knitting-work as close in the corner as possible. Elizabeth brought in a large basket of rags, and she and Margaret were soon busy sewing strips and winding balls for a carpet. The younger children were absorbed in their lessons at the table, where the father sat reading his newspaper.

All were silent, for to have spoken while

father was reading would have been an unforgivable offense. At last, however, Mr. Stillman lifted his eyes from the paper and, addressing Tom, said: "Well, how did you get along at school to-day?"

"Oh, first-rate," said the boy; but that lost head mark rankled in his mind, and he added, "Rachel was called up by the teacher."

"How was that, Rachel?" said her father, sharply. Poor girl! Deep in the mysteries of long division, she did not hear him.

"Rachel," he repeated, "what were you called up in school for to-day?"

She glanced reproachfully at Tom. "I read a little in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' father. It 's not a story-book—"

"Never mind what it is. I send you to school to study, and you 're not to touch any but your school-books."

"May I bring it home?" she faltered.

"Bring it home, indeed! No, miss. I guess you can find enough to do at home. Not another word more, or you will stay at home for good."

The child bent over her slate; but tears would come, and at last a sob burst forth.

"Clear out to bed, Rachel," said her father, angrily. "I want no sniveling here."

Up-stairs, in the cold, dark room, what bitter thoughts surged through the childish brain!

Mr. Stillman loved his wife and children. He wanted them to be happy, but in his way. He must choose their pleasures. If they could not be satisfied with what he chose for them, it was not his fault; it was their perversity. And as no two souls are alike, the attempt to fit a number of them by the same pattern necessarily caused suffering to the souls undergoing the operation.

Mrs. Stillman's sensitive organization was completely crushed; her eldest daughter's nearly so. Martha, the second daughter, had escaped by marrying a clever young man, who first pitied, then loved the daughter of his employer, and persuaded her to elope with him, assuring her of a happier home than she had with her father.

The marriage angered Mr. Stillman greatly,

and all intercourse with the disobedient daughter was forbidden.

Margaret, the third daughter, also rebelled at the fitting process; and having a goodly portion of her father's determination, many were the sharp words that passed between them.

So far Rachel and Susan had given no trouble. He ordered them about as he did his dumb animals, and with no more regard to their feelings. With his sons it was different. They would be men some day. They must be treated with some consideration. At an early age John, two years older than Elizabeth, was given a share in the stock, and land to cultivate, so that when, at the age of twenty-four, he married, he had a "right good start in the world."

But his sister toiled early and late, washing, ironing, milking, churning, baking, nursing the younger children, sharing her mother's labors, and paid as her mother was—with her board and a scanty, grudgingly given wardrobe. She was now twenty-four, and had never had a five-dollar bill to spend as

she pleased in her life; for that matter, neither had the mother. There are many Mr. Stillmans. "Are they honest men?" If father and son have the right to be paid for their labor, have not the mother and daughter? I leave the question with you.

Rachel carried a heavy heart to school next morning. The tinker's wonderful allegory to her was very real, and to leave her hero in that awful dungeon was almost more than she could bear. When at recess the teacher offered her the book she did not take it.

"Father said," she began; then sobs choked her utterance. He understood, and after a moment's silence said: "I am interested in Christian as well as you, Rachel, and if you will sit here I will read to you." In all her after-life Rachel never forgot these readings at intermission, which were continued not only until Christian reached the Celestial City, but until Christiana and the children completed their wonderful journey to the same place. Her gratitude to her young teacher would certainly have become love had she been a few years older. As it

was, when in March the term closed, not even the prize as the best speller—a beautiful copy of "Pilgrim's Progress"—consoled her for the cessation of school.

As for the teacher, he was glad the winter's work—which had been undertaken and conscientiously carried through solely for the purpose of obtaining means to pursue the study of his profession—was over. He liked some of his scholars very much, Rachel especially; she was so interested in her studies, so intelligent and grateful, that when, with eyes swimming in tears, she bade him good-by, he felt a moment's sorrow at leaving her, and comforted her by telling her what a good girl she had been, and that he would not forget her.

"You ought to have seen Rache an' Suse cry when old Gray bid us good-by," said Tom that evening at home.

"Did you cry?" asked Margaret.

"Guess not! Glad school 's out; an' I 'm never goin' any more."

"I would n't if I were you, bub," said Margaret; "you know enough now." She

always called him "bub" when she wanted to vex him. "But 'old Gray,' as you call him, will be somebody yet; see if he don't."

The entrance of Mr. Stillman closed the conversation, and Tom went out, banging the door after him. No wonder Margaret was getting ill-natured.

The winter was a long, dull season at Stillman's. Even her enjoyment at the few social gatherings she was permitted to attend in the neighborhood was marred by the knowledge that she could not entertain her young friends in return. She had attempted once to fix up the "spare room" and have a fire for some company, but her father had peremptorily forbidden it. "I 'd like to know," he said, "why the settin'-room ain't good enough! If your company is too nice to be with the rest of the family, they can stay away, miss."

And "they" generally did stay away after one visit. Mr. Stillman was not a success as a host, young people thought; and a young minister who came home from meeting one Sunday with Elizabeth was so completely

abashed by the cool reception he met that not even the daughter's pleading eyes could persuade him to remain in her father's presence. A few weeks after he went to a distant appointment, and Elizabeth's sad face grew sadder than ever.

Jim Lansing, the son of a widow who managed a farm and two grown sons with equal skill, was more successful. He usually brought his mother with him, and while she entertained Mr. and Mrs. Stillman, Jim, the girls, and the carpet rags escaped to the kitchen.

But spring was near, and Margaret thought, "He can't keep us out of the spare room in summer; and, besides, we can be out of doors."

June came, with her blue skies, her singing birds, her wealth of beauty. But there was no time at Stillman's to enjoy it. A larger crop than usual had been put in, and extra hands employed—but not in the house. Why, there were five women, counting frail little ten-year-old Susy as one, and poor, delicate Mrs. Stillman as another! What

extra help could they need, although washing and cooking must be done for all the men? You see, "hands" could be got much cheaper if they were boarded—and what else had the women to do?

It was true, mother was not as strong as she used to be; but she did not complain. She was only more shadowy and quiet; and Mr. Stillman told his daughters to "stir around" themselves, and not let their mother do all the work.

"Oh, dear," said Margaret, one morning, as she and Rachel were bending over the wash-tubs, while Susy labored at the heavy churning, and the mother and Elizabeth were preparing dinner, "I wish we could go to the picnic on the Fourth; everybody's going."

"Maybe we can," said Rachel, hopefully. "I heard father say the wheat was late this year, and he did not believe it would do to cut before the sixth. And oh, Margaret, I heard him say your calf would bring at least ten dollars; and if he gives you the money you can get a new white dress and give

me your old one. It is lots too small for you."

Margaret laughed. "Yes," she said, "father said if I could raise the calf I might have it. Did n't I have a time with it, though, it was so near dead! Of course I will fix my old dress up for you—that is, if I get the money. Sometimes I think father 's queer; he did not give Elizabeth the money when he sold that colt he had given her." And both girls were silent.

Out in the barn-yard, as the girls worked, Mr. Stillman and Tom were putting the pretty calf in the wagon preparatory to taking it to the butcher in the town a few miles distant. When the girls went in to dinner the men had finished theirs, and were lounging in the shady yard enjoying their nooning.

As they were about to sit down at the table, Mr. Stillman handed Margaret a package, saying, "There 's your share of that spotted calf, Margaret."

"My share!" she exclaimed. "Why, you gave me the calf; you had no right to it."

As she spoke she opened the package and

unrolled a piece of cheap lawn—yellow ground dotted with blue. She flung it angrily on the floor and ran out of the room.

Mr. Stillman turned to Rachel after a moment of dumb amazement, and said: "You can have the dress, Rachel. I 'll teach Margaret a lesson."

"I don't want it," she said. "You had no right to take Margaret's money. You did give her the calf, and when you sold Tom's pig you gave him his money."

"Nice girls you 're raising, mother," said Mr. Stillman to his frightened wife. "They 'll be turning us out of doors next. You pick up that lawn, miss."

Rachel did so. As she folded it he went on: "That calf was mine. I only meant to pay her for caring for it."

"You should have told her so, then," said his daughter, facing him with eyes keen as his own; "but you told her if she could raise it she might have it, and of course she believed you."

He raised his hand as if to strike her; then,

as she did not move or drop her eyes, he turned and left the room.

July came, but the Stillman girls did not go to the picnic. Tom and the "hands" did; and Mrs. Lansing and her boys stopped at Stillman's on their way and offered the girls seats in their wagon. But Mr. Stillman said his women had to get ready for the harvest hands who were coming next day, and Margaret said to Rachel, bitterly: "We have no decent clothes to go in, anyhow." And there was much washing, ironing, cooking, and churning done as the days went on. No wonder Mrs. Stillman grew paler and weaker, until even her husband noticed it, and brought her a bottle of bitters, and told the girls to "keep mother out of the kitchen," which they indeed tried to do. But how could the mother rest when there was so much to do? The girls could not manage as she could, and Elizabeth seemed "so poorly"; for the patient elder daughter, as the summer dragged along, had a pitifully hopeless look on her pale face, and went about listlessly, as if life had lost all interest for her.

At last there came a morning when the mother did not rise for breakfast.

"Had n't we better send for Dr. Lewis, father?" said Elizabeth.

"Oh, no; your mother did not sleep much, it was so hot last night. She 'll be up directly. You keep her out of the kitchen, and see you have dinner on time. We want to finish to-day, for I expect we 'll have a storm, from the feel of the air."

Noon came. Dinner for a dozen hungry men was on the table, and still Mrs. Stillman was in bed. While the men were eating Rachel slipped in to her mother. She was awake, but her flushed face and wild, bright eyes startled the girl.

"Oh, mother!" she cried, "you are very sick; you must have the doctor."

"No, dear," the mother answered; "father is too busy now. I 'll be better after a while. You go help wait on the table."

Rachel returned to the dining-room. "Take that fly-brush, Rachel," said her father. "Susy 's no account; she 's too lazy to keep it going."

Poor, tired little Susy, who had done a large churning that morning, crimsoned to the roots of her hair as she handed Rachel the brush and hurried out of the room.

When dinner was over Mr. Stillman glared into the room where his wife lay. "She is asleep," he said. "I guess she 's all right."

"She has n't eaten a thing to-day," said Rachel. "Had n't she better have the doctor?"

"Well," said her father, impatiently, "if she 's no better in the morning I 'll send for him"; and he went back to the field.

Rachel went for Mrs. Lansing, for she and her sisters grew frightened as the mother's fever increased. When that good woman came she saw at once the serious condition of her friend.

"I saw Dr. Lewis coming down the road in his buggy as I came," she said. "One of you hurry out and stop him."

When, about five o'clock, the rain began to fall in torrents, Mr. Stillman had the satisfaction of seeing the last load of grain driven inside the barn door; and taking off

his hat, he wiped the moisture from his face, saying: "Well, boys, we beat the rain, and I don't care if it pours down now."

He walked toward the house, and, to his surprise, saw the well-known figure of Dr. Lewis on the front porch. "Driven in by the rain," he thought. "I'll get him to give mother a little medicine."

"How are you, doctor?" he said, as he stepped upon the porch. "Lucky getting my wheat in, was n't I?"

"Very," said the doctor, gravely; "but I am sorry to say I find Mrs. Stillman a very sick woman. You should have sent for me long ago." The husband was startled.

"Why," he said, "she has been going about until to-day. I guess it 's this weather has made her so weak. She can't be very sick."

The physician was silent for a moment; then he said: "If there is not a change for the better soon, I fear she will live but a few days. I cannot understand how she has kept up"; and he turned and went into the sick-room.

For once the men at Stillman's ate a cold supper and did the milking. Mrs. Lansing took things into her own capable hands. John and his wife were sent for and came, and Jim Lansing quietly hitched up a team and went for Martha and her husband—poor Martha, who had not seen her mother for more than a year!

All night Mr. Stillman watched by the bedside or walked up and down the long back porch. It could not be she would die—his wife. It was the hot weather; she was just weak and tired. That was it, Mr. Stillman—worn out, tired; and rest was coming. When Martha came the mother who had so longed for her did not recognize her.

"Mother, only speak to me!" cried the daughter in anguish; but the mother looked at her with dimming eyes that saw no more of earth, and muttered as she turned upon her couch, "Hurry, girls; it 's nearly noon. Hurry! Father will be angry if he has to wait."

Then she grew quiet; only her restless hands, which her daughters vainly strove to

hold, kept reaching out as if to grasp that unknown land she was so soon to enter; and before the sun was high in the morning Mrs. Stillman had found rest.

Her husband was stunned. With haggard face he bent over his dead. "If I had known!" he said. "Oh, my wife, if I had known, I would have taken better care of you."

Ah, Mr. Stillman, you are not the only one who with remorseful heart cries, "If I had only known, if I had only known!"

Life went on as usual at Stillman's after the mother had left them. For a while the father was kinder, but as time went on the old habit was resumed. Elizabeth went mechanically about her work, and her father did not notice her evidently failing health. Her quietness was a relief to him, for Margaret was growing more defiant toward him, and quarreled constantly with Tom, who, now that his mother's influence was withdrawn, became more and more meddlesome and overbearing in his conduct toward his sisters. The summer following Mrs. Stillman's

death, Mrs. Lansing's eldest son, Frank, took unto himself a wife; and late in the fall the neighborhood was electrified by the unexpected marriage of Mrs. Lansing and Mr. Stillman. Her boys, on learning her intention, had remonstrated; but she said: "You boys do not need me, and these girls do. Think of a young girl like Rachel saying, 'God had nothing to do with my mother's death. It was hard work killed her!' And when I tried to tell her of His goodness to His creatures she said: 'Yes, He is good enough to men. All He cares for women is to create them for men's convenience.' And then there 's little Susy, with a face like her mother's. Why, it just haunts me!"

"Well," said Jim, "things are in a bad fix over there; but it is n't Susy's face that haunts me, by any means."

His mother laughed. "I shall take care of Margaret," she said. "She and Elizabeth need some one to look after them; they are being worked to death."

Four years have slipped over the heads of the Stillmans—years well improved by

Rachel and Susy at the academy in the town near their father's farm; years which gave Margaret's happiness into Jim Lansing's keeping, and made Jim a young man of whom his sisters were extremely proud. Even Elizabeth's sad face looks as if life might be worth living, for under the second wife life at Stillman's had taken on a different color. The spare room is a pretty sitting-room for the young folks.

"We don't want them always with us," says Mrs. Stillman, as she shows her husband the change she has made; for one of her peculiarities is that she manages her household affairs as she thinks best, taking it for granted that her husband will approve. As for Rachel, she enjoyed the change for the better; but now to the bitter feeling which she cherished toward her father was added a touch of contempt. "See," she thought, "how he can be flattered into doing things; if my mother could have managed him so she might have lived."

Rachel was mistaken; the new wife did not manœuver or flatter: she simply took her

proper place as mistress of the house; not as a sort of upper servant, to be snubbed or praised, at the master's humor.

Another summer had been added to Rachel's years when, one evening, Tom came home from town, and entering the dining-room where she was preparing the table for supper, exclaimed, "Rachel, do you remember old Gray, as I used to call him, who taught our school the winter before mother died?"

"Yes," she said, "I remember him. Mother liked him."

"Well, I met him in town to-day. He 's on that Sanders case. He knew me right off, and he 's coming out here this evening, so fix up nice and be looking your sweetest. They say he 's smart; I heard some of the old lawyers talking about him." And Tom caught his sister about the waist and waltzed her out on the porch.

"Rachel," said Susy, as, in their own room, the girls were dressing after supper, "you are very hard to please to-night, and you seem nervous. What ails you?"

Rachel smiled. "I am thinking of old days, that is all," she said. But she entered the little parlor where Tom and the guest were seated in a perfectly self-possessed manner, saying as she held out her hand:

"Good evening, teacher. How goes the battle with Apollyon?"

And the young lawyer sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "Rachel! is it possible?" and he retained her hand and looked into her eyes so long that Susy, who had followed her into the room, and Tom declared that he fell in love then and there. However that may be, it is certain Mr. Gray showed a wonderful interest in Stillman's district. The trial in progress at Meywood was tedious, but his patience did not give out; and when some of the lawyers proposed to hold night sessions of court he objected earnestly, saying, "It would be too hard on the old judge."

But all things must end, and the case was at last decided in favor of Mr. Gray's client. As Rachel congratulated him on his victory, he said, with a look that brought the color to her face:

"How long must I stay in Doubting Castle, Rachel?"

"Why, dear me," she answered, saucily, "I did not think a promising young lawyer, as father calls you, ever got into such a dismal place!"

Then Susy came in, and the young man bade her good-by; but he whispered promise of speedy return to Rachel, and as he traveled homeward those wonderful eyes of hers seemed to haunt him.

"Who would have thought," he said to himself, "she could have become such a woman? No wonder I could not find a girl to suit me, when she has been my ideal."

You see, he was trying to persuade himself he had thought of her ever since that term of school; and it may be, unknown to himself, those eyes had held him. At any rate, he says they did; and when, time after time, they drew him back to Stillman's, he at last made Rachel believe it, and with the little key of promise she delivered him from Doubting Castle.

Let us take one more look, two years later,

at the Stillman homestead. There is a family gathering, and all the girls are present—Martha and Margaret with their sturdy boys and rosy girls; Rachel with her baby; and Susy, a gay young aunt, flits to and fro, playing with and teasing the little ones. Elizabeth, with unwonted brightness in her eyes, looks on, enjoying the merriment.

"Does n't it seem odd," whispers Margaret, "that Lizzie's minister should come back after all these years?"

"Yes," answers Rachel, in the same low tone. "I am so glad. She seems so happy."

The husbands are all present in the evening, and the old house is full of light and gaiety. Rachel slips up-stairs to put baby to bed; and as she sits in the room where so many miserable hours of her childhood were spent, her tears fall, thinking of herself and the dear, patient mother who had suffered and died; and the old bitterness rises in her heart. Baby stirs, and she hushes him, then lays him gently in the old cradle and goes down-stairs. Some impulse prompts her to enter the sitting-room instead of the

parlor, where she thinks the family are all gathered.

As she opens the door she sees her father sitting, as of old, by the table on which the lamp is burning, and she half turns to go out; but something in his attitude touches her. He is not reading, for the newspaper lies untouched; he is looking at something in his hand.

She notices how gray his hair is, and how age is tracing lines on his face. "Are you feeling sick, father?" she asks.

"Oh, no," he says. "Look here, Rachel"; and he hands her a faded daguerreotype of her mother, taken when she was a fair young bride. "I was thinking about her."

"How much like Susy!" she said, with tears falling on the lovely face.

"Yes, only she was prettier," he answers. "I have been thinking of her so much lately, Rachel. I am going to do something that would please her. I have bought that pretty little place of Perry's, and I will put Martha and her husband on it. Dick 's a good, industrious fellow; but it 's hard to make any-

thing on a rented farm, and Martha 's worried too much. You don't think any of the children will object?" and he looked anxiously in her face.

"Object? Why, they will be glad, father!" And dropping her head on his shoulder, she puts her arm around him for the first time in her life; and as she slips the little daguerreotype in his hand a sweet peace fills her heart, and she thinks, "The bitterness is gone, and love fills its place." After a while she joins the group in the parlor. They are singing to Susy's accompaniment on the organ.

"Sing 'Coronation,' Susy," she says, as she sits down beside her husband and glances lovingly in his face.

"What is it?" he whispers. "You are unusually happy."

"Yes," she answers; "I have had a vision of the land of Beulah, where Love is king."

A GAME POSTPONED

BY

GERTRUDE SMITH

A GAME POSTPONED

IT had been snowing for two days, and now the snow-plows were out, and the first really good sleighing of the winter would begin.

The great fields lay in unbroken whiteness. The woods along the banks of the Iowa River were billows of snow. The large farm-houses, and the number and size of the barns and other outlying buildings, gave evidence of the richness of the soil that lay buried and resting for another harvest.

Judge Hilton's house had the distinction of being built of brick. There was a dignity in its solidity over the usual white frame-houses on the surrounding farms that well became the dignity of the judge.

The judge was New England born and bred. There is the veneration for Puritan ancestry in the entirely Western soul that the Puritan mind still has for good old English blood.

Isabel Hilton was her father's housekeeper and only child. The mother had died while she was a baby, and she had ruled the house and been ruled by her father since that time.

She had all her father's reserve and pride of family, and at the same time his happy nature and gracious manner, that won her friends when she desired to make friends. Those who found it impossible to win their way into her favor called this reserve in Isabel—her "down East airs." There was a discouraging belief among the young men in the country around, some of whose fathers owned farms and herds of cattle large enough to divide and establish them in enviable beginnings, that if the judge thought any of them worthy to win his daughter's love there would never be an opportunity to gain the consent of the young lady.

The judge had theories against Isabel's

entertaining young men alone, nor would he permit her to go with any escort but himself.

The privilege of spending the evening with Isabel, in the presence of her father, was considered a mark of distinction, and held the one so honored on the wave of hope.

"If a fellow had the backbone to outsit the judge some night, he might propose to the daughter," was the comment Mr. Holderman made to his son one day. Clint Holderman had been one of Isabel's most persistent admirers.

"The trouble with all of you is, you go there shaking in your boots, and talk to the judge, and come away with the big head because you dared do that; but I tell you, if I was a young fellow I 'd outsit him if I sat till the break of day. It 's some such pluck as that the judge is looking for. He raised her, and he knows her value; and she ain't going cheap to none of you. If you can go in ahead of the other fellows and tow her in, I 'll give you ten thousand dollars and deed you a section of land. Come, now, let 's see what you 're made of!"

CLINT.

In some way this lordly promise got adrift the current of country gossip, and roused the admirers of Isabel, one and all, to new interest in the contest. Large stories were told of the late hours the judge kept that winter with Isabel's suitors.

Clint Holderman drove over to the brick house early on the evening that he had set his mind with flint-like determination to give his father's advice the trial.

ISABEL.

It was a cold night, and as he sped along in his new cutter, drawn by a handsome span of black horses, and well tucked in with buffalo-robes, his heart was warm with hope.

He had spent many evenings of the winter playing chess with the judge, so he was sure of his welcome; but to-night he looked beyond all this. He thought of the hour when, at last, with his heart and understanding touched, the judge would bid them good

night, and he should be left alone with Isabel.

There was no handsomer young man in the country than Clint Holderman; none who danced better, or who drove better horses; but more than all this, the judge had repeatedly told him that he had never known a man who played a better hand at chess.

This was an encouragement indeed; for if the judge had a weakness, it was for chess, and it would be decidedly pleasant to have a son-in-law who could be to him such a ready source of entertainment. As he drove into the yard, the judge came out on the side piazza.

"Good evening," he called out. "Just drive on to the barn; the man will put out your horses."

One of the farm-hands came out of the stable as he spoke, and Clint threw him the reins and followed the judge into the house.

"Snapping cold, but splendid sleighing," the judge said, while Clint was pulling off his overcoat in the hall.

"Yes. I believe my ears are touched," Clint answered, rubbing them.

"Isabel is popping some corn. She'll be glad you happened over to help eat it."

He led the way into the long sitting-room at the end of the hall.

Isabel was on her knees before an open wood fire, shaking a corn-popper.

The white kernels snapped and expanded with a pleasant sound.

The lamp had not been lit, but the firelight made the room bright and cozy.

"Isabel, here is Mr. Holderman, my dear."

She sprang up.

"I did n't hear you come in. Good evening. Come over here by the fire. Why, it's Clint!" she said, as he came into the glow. "I thought father meant your father. I never think of you as Mr. Holderman. Have some corn."

She held the popper open before him. "I'm sure I never think of you as Miss Hilton," he said, plunging his hand into the corn, and laughing. "That would be a little too much like strangers, as long as we've known each other."

The judge cleared his throat.

"I have always decidedly disliked the informality of country people in calling every one by their Christian names," he said. "It leaves no degree in intimacy. But I suppose it is impossible to know where to draw the line."

Isabel went back and knelt before the fire again.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, shaking the popper vigorously. "As long as it is a custom, I don't think any one feels it a mark of special intimacy, and so the custom is protected by being a custom."

The young man sat awkwardly in his chair, and was silent.

They seemed to be closing the doors against any thought he might have of closer intimacy with the family.

The judge left the room for a moment, and came back with a lighted lamp and placed it on the claw-legged table in the center of the room. He had put on a long dressing-gown faced with crimson quilted silk, and now he drew his great chair up before the fire, and stretched himself out in it.

"Come, Clint, I will let you shake the popper for me, and I 'll go down cellar and get some apples." Isabel looked at him with a merry twinkle in her eyes, as she held the handle toward him, and then ran out of the room.

Clint grasped the handle of the popper with the delight of success flooding his veins. Isabel had never before given him a reason to believe that she cared for him that could compare with that look.

Daylight would find him sitting right there, but he would beat the judge's watch, and gain the opportunity of speaking to her.

It was a delightful evening. The judge partook of the pop-corn, and the conversation was more than usually affable and entertaining.

Isabel sat on the opposite side of the fireplace, and crocheted on a blue wool scarf. There were pink spots burning her cheeks, and her eyes were very sweet.

The time passed on until the noisy clock on the mantel clearly and forcibly announced the hour of ten.

It had been comparatively easy this far, but now was the time when Clint usually went home.

The real contest was about to begin.

The judge shoved his chair back to the table, picked up a paper, and began to read.

From time to time he glanced over the top of his paper at the two talking before the fire, but still read on.

When the clock struck eleven he threw the paper down, pulled his chair back to the fire, and drew the young man into an animated political discussion.

Isabel stirred about the room, putting things in order for the night.

It was nearing midnight. For the last fifteen minutes the conversation had begun to lag.

There were cold moments of complete silence.

"Had you noticed that I had traded horses?" Clint asked in one painful pause.

"No; have you?" Isabel asked, coming forward with interest.

"Yes; I 've traded the grays for George

Merwin's blacks. Of course there was considerable to boot. They go like the wind in my new cutter."

"I should think they would." Isabel drew a deep breath. "I do like black horses. I never cared for gray ones. I always think of having to look for a red-headed girl," she laughed. "I should think you 'd always be on the outlook for one when you ride behind them."

"Perhaps Mr. Holderman is looking for a red-headed girl," the judge said, with a queer look in the direction of the young man. "There 's a superstition that a red-headed girl has a violent temper. Now that is n't always true," he said after a moment's silence, in which his thought seemed to have been far away. "Isabel's mother had as sweet a disposition as any woman that ever lived, and her hair was the color of that deep flame there."

Isabel was leaning on the back of her father's chair. "Why, father, you 've always said my hair was almost the color of mother's. I 'm sure no one would think of calling mine red."

"I don't know about that," the judge laughed; "and I don't know about the temper, either," he added, reaching up and pinching her cheek.

"I never liked red hair, but I 'm sure I don't believe in that sign," Clint said clumsily. He gazed fixedly into the fire, and felt as though he were turning to stone.

The clock struck twelve with a resonant, defiant stroke, as though it understood the contest in which it held the stakes, and refused to commit itself as to whose side would win.

At a quarter past twelve the judge stood up.

Clint felt his heart beating wildly. The moment of triumph was at hand.

The judge crossed to the bay-window at the other end of the room. Isabel's eyes followed him nervously.

From one side, among the geraniums and ivy, he drew the chess-table, and pushed it before him toward the fire.

"I think it would be pleasant for us to have a game of chess," he said affably.

Clint sprang to his feet.

"Oh, thank you, sir. I think I must be going home."

"Oh, must you? Well, come over again, and we 'll get at it earlier in the evening."

It seemed hours before Clint finally found himself out on the smooth, snow-beaten road, spinning along toward home.

He would have been completely wretched in his defeat if it had not been for that look in Isabel's eyes when she handed him the corn-popper. He could endure his father's ridicule, and wait his time, remembering that look.

And so he made a good story of it at breakfast the next morning, and added, elevating his voice above the roaring laugh of his father and the shrieks of his mother and sister:

"Never you mind. The judge is n't through with me yet. I 've only fired my first gun. I 'll own when I came out of the house I was out of shot, but I have n't given up the fight yet."

"Oh, you 'll let some other bantam rooster

carry her off. I guess I'm safe enough on the cash and land I promised you," his father answered with a provoking laugh.

"Don't you count on it," Clint said, springing up from the table with fire in his eyes. "I 'm not downed yet, I tell you."

"All right, sonny; we 'll give a big dance to celebrate your engagement, and an oyster supper. I suppose there 's no rush about ordering the oysters?"

"I 'll hold you to that," Clint said, bringing his fist up against the door. "If the thing 's settled by Saturday week, we 'll have the dance. If it is n't—well, it won't be. I 'm going over to town after the mail."

He turned and went out of the room. As the door closed, he heard his sister say, tittering:

"Clint has about as hard a time courting Isabel as you had courting mother."

This was a warm thought of comfort to him. At least Isabel had never denied him her love, and he knew that his mother had been hardly won.

It was a bright winter morning. Before

him was a clear stretch of road to the Iowa River, three miles away.

The white fields on either side sparkled in the sunlight. The great drifts, rolled up along the fences, looked blue in the shadows of their fantastic terracings. The sleighing never was better.

All at once Clint heard the noise of sleigh-bells, and a voice called to him, "Give me the road!"

He turned, and saw Isabel Hilton coming toward him, driving her own bay ponies at a fearful rate.

Clint drove quickly out at one side of the road, and she sped by him.

He saw that her horses were running away.

There had been no alarm in Isabel's face, though she was holding the reins with all her strength, and had looked neither to the right nor the left as she passed him. If there was one thing more than another that the Holdermans prided themselves in, it was their knowledge of a good horse and splendid horsemanship.

Isabel Hilton's love of horses and her dar-

ing in driving them had been one of the first things that had won Clint's admiration. Her control and courage now appealed to him tremendously. His own horses seemed to have caught the spirit of the runaway pair ahead, as they flew along over the snow after them.

Clint knew that at any moment Isabel's slight arms might lose the power to hold those tense reins so securely, and the horses dash to one side, and the crash come, and there was nothing he could do. On went the cutter ahead of him, swaying to the left and the right, but still keeping the road. The bridge across the Iowa River was just ahead. Clint thought of the bridge with terror. If the cutter swayed to one side, as it was doing now, the crash would come on entering.

He saw Isabel's strength tightening on the reins, and knew that she felt the danger.

Her horses flew up the slight incline to the bridge, and Clint braced his nerves to withstand the shock. But, to his amazement, he saw that the horses were slowing up and entering the bridge with all the respect of

well-trained horses; and by the time they were over the frozen current below they were walking as quietly as though they had decided on that point as the end of their excitement.

Clint entered the bridge as Isabel was leaving it. She drove out to one side of the road, and waited for him to come up to her.

"I 'll let you go on ahead of me now, if you want to," she called out as he stopped.

"Look here," Clint called back, "did you think of those horses stopping at the bridge that way, I 'd like to know?"

"Yes; did n't you? I knew they might not, but I thought they would if I could keep them in the road. Did n't you think of their doing it?"

"Well, no. I had something else to think about," he answered, looking at her admiringly.

Isabel's face flushed, but she looked at him smiling.

"I was n't afraid as long as the road was clear, but I should have lost all courage if I had seen a team coming."

"Talk of pluck!" Clint said, driving a little nearer to her cutter. "Isabel, what did you think of last night? What did you think of me, anyway?"

She drove out into the road ahead of him, and then looked back over her shoulder, laughing. "I thought, if you had only waited half an hour longer I would have been eighteen. It is my birthday to-day. I 'm of age." And with that she touched her ponies with the whip, and kept well ahead of him all the way to the village.

When they met again it was before the fire in the sitting-room at the brick house, where they had held the hours the night before. But the contest with the judge had lost its seriousness.

Between them he sat, imperturbable, as he had sat the night before; but to-night he was only an amusing barrier, and not a serious obstruction. Love had leaped the bounds, and was free. It triumphed in their eyes as they looked across him, and over him, smiling knowingly at each other.

"We 're going to have a dance over at our

house Saturday week, and an oyster supper. It is going to be a celebration of a great event in our family," Clint announced with a meaning gesture to Isabel.

"What 's the event you 're celebrating?" the judge asked, looking over his spectacles.

"Well, that 's something of a secret until to-morrow. I hope I can tell you then. You must be sure and come. We 're going to have a great time."

The judge looked at Isabel. "Do you think we can go, my dear?"

Her cheeks were rosy. "Why, yes; I should think we could, father."

"Thank you, then; we 'll come," the judge said, leaning back in his chair, and looking at the ceiling. "And now would you like to play that game of chess we did n't have last night?"

It was evident he had no intention of giving up the field. Clint did not answer. He was not as fearless of the judge as he had supposed. His heart throbbed excitedly.

Isabel pressed her hands together hard,

and looked into the fire. The clock ticked loudly, emphasizing the silence.

Finally the judge brought his eyes from the ceiling, and looked at the young man.

"Did n't you hear what I said to you?" he asked, running his hand through his forelock, and grasping the arm of his chair.

"Yes, sir, I did," said Clint, respectfully.

"Well, then?"

"If you 'll allow me to say it, sir, I think I 've won the game already."

"What 's that?"

"I believe, sir, I 've won the game."

The judge glared at him for a moment, and then his eyes fell on Isabel.

He looked from one to the other.

The ticks of the clock seemed to choke each other.

"Well, my boy," he said, drawing a deep breath,—the tears had started to his eyes,—"I don't know but you have." He held out his hand. "I don't know but you have, my boy."

"Thank you, sir; thank you."

Her father reached the other hand to

Isabel, and stood up and drew her into his arms; then pushed her from him, and crossed the room to the door leading into the hall.

Isabel's eyes followed him lovingly.

He turned and looked back at them and smiled.

"Well, children, I 'm feeling a little tired to-night," he said, "and I think, if you 'll be kind enough to excuse me, I 'll go to bed."

He went out and shut the door.

WHEN SHE WAS THIRTY

BY

LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON

WHEN SHE WAS THIRTY

IT was Eleanor Gray's thirtieth birthday. Suddenly she awoke to the knowledge that youth, with its vague hopes and dreams, was over. She had never quite understood how swiftly the years were passing. One day was so like another, and the heart in her was so young, she half thought that she herself was a young girl still, and that love might be waiting round the corner. Hitherto hope had held her by the hand. But somehow there was a cruel positiveness in the number thirty. So many years had she lived—the years of charm and expectancy. What could there be to come now? But what had there been, even in the past?

She went back, in her thoughts, over the life she had lived, and regarded it as if it had been that of some other person. She had been born in the wrong family, she said to herself; that was the beginning. They loved her well, the practical, unimaginative parents whose only child she was; but they had never understood what she meant. Her ways were not as their ways, nor her thoughts as their thoughts. They had been proud of her in some uncomprehending fashion, but they had smiled at her aspirations and ambitions as at the amusing vagaries of a petted infant. They gave her the harp on which she wanted to play just as they had given her the talking doll she had coveted and made friends with when she was a child. They let her buy herself poetry books just as they had let her buy sweetmeats. They were good and dear,—oh, *so* good and dear!—she said to herself on this morning of her thirtieth birthday. But they did not know her. No one had ever known her; of that she felt certain.

She took a little hand-mirror from her dressing-table, and began to study her face

in it. The features had not changed very much since she was twenty. Perhaps the eyes were a little more sad, and the cheeks had not quite the wild-rose bloom that be-

longed to them ten years ago; but really there was not so very much difference. Then she held the glass nearer and looked in it a little more closely. There were—yes,

there were—wrinkles, slight yet unmistakable, at the corners of her eyes. They were big blue eyes, by the way, with black lashes. The young gold of her hair was turning to autumnal brown; and the lips that had never been warmed by kisses seemed to have grown thinner.

"Yes," she said; "ah, yes; I *am* older. I can see it in the glass. I am not so pretty as I was; but what good did the prettiness do? Who ever loved me really, unless—" She did not finish the sentence. If she had it would have been "unless Tom did."

And then she laid down the glass, and her thoughts went on a long journey, back to the far-away days when Tom Rhodes used to come home with her from all sorts of places, and look at her with such eloquent eyes that she had not forgotten their language even yet. She had never let him go farther than looking, however. The world—her unconquered kingdom—was all before her in those days, and she did not mean to take Tom for prime minister. He was a dear good fellow—she used always to think that when she thought

about him at all. But there were poets in the world, and painters and statesmen; and Tom—was only Tom. He taught school in the winter, and was busy on his widowed mother's small farm in the summer; and try how you would, you could not fancy him in the aspect of a conquering hero. So she had kept Tom from speaking, and finally his mother had died, and he had sold the little farm, had gone away to that vague part of the world known in those days as "out West." What he had done there, or what had become of him, who knew? Not Eleanor, at any rate.

She wondered if it were such keen torture to other women to feel that they had grown old. It seemed to her just then that youth was all—all. She had quaffed its wine, and now in the cup were dregs only. And then she sadly smiled. What wine had she ever quaffed, after all? People used to call her beautiful,—and surely she must have been at least pretty—but what good had it done her? The right suitor had never come. Of the few who seemed to care for her, she thought in this hour only of Tom. She re-

membered tones and looks, shy flowers shyly given, tender little cares for her comfort in small things. But in those old days her ambition soared far beyond Tom. Would it have been better had she cared for him? Would *he* have understood her? Would love have made that possible? For she felt now that her deepest longing had always been to be understood. Love that was given to the external Eleanor would never have been enough. She must meet some one who had the key to her deepest soul, else must she live and die more solitary than any monk of old in his hidden hermitage.

Could it be that she had thrown away what

might have been life's fullness of joy? Ah, well, it was of no use to wonder now. Tom was far away, and she was thirty years old. Just then she saw the old village postman coming slowly down the street. She threw up the window, and reached out an impatient hand for the letters he brought. They were all from school-girl friends, she saw, as she glanced at the handwriting on the envelopes. She was not in the mood to care much for them. "Drearily uninteresting," she said to herself as she opened one. A slip of paper dropped from it unheeded. Eleanor read on listlessly. Suddenly her eyes kindled. She had come to this sentence: "I used to hear you speak of Tom Rhodes—an aspirant of yours, was he not? Can this marriage notice I inclose be his?"

Eleanor picked up the bit of paper from the floor and studied it. It was cut from the Denver (Colorado) "Times," and it read:

"Thomas J. Rhodes of Connecticut to Margaret Eliza, daughter of John Riding,

Esq., President of the Wheel of Fire Mining Company."

So that was what had become of Tom. She had not remembered the J. in his name, but of course it must be Tom. There could hardly be another Tom Rhodes of Connecticut. It sounded prosperous, this marriage to the daughter of the president of a mining company. So this was the end of her one true lover. She had never said before, even to herself, that she knew Tom loved her; but she acknowledged it to her own heart now. It was as if a window had been opened into the past, and a great flood of light poured from a day whose sun had long since set.

Yes, Tom *had* loved her, and Tom *would* have understood. He and she might have been one, if only she had known—if only that weak ambition she used to think so strong and fine had not held her heart in its thrall. She had the New England conscience, and it was borne in upon her mind that she ought to wish Tom to be happy in this new love, this new life. Did she? She

tried to cheat herself into thinking so, but her soul defied her. "You know well," cried the voice of conscience within her, "that you don't want him to be quite, quite happy. You would n't like him to be absolutely miserable, but you want him to be something short of satisfied; to say to himself every day, and every day, 'Ah! Eleanor would not have done this, or said that; Eleanor would have understood better.'"

And then conscience cried aloud, "Oh, you poor, small soul! Is that the best of which you are capable? You would not care for him when he might have been yours; he was not grand enough for you then; and now you would wish him something short of life's best good!" And she listened to the voice, and, afraid of herself, she cried out for strength; and it was as if her guardian angel leaned from the heights of heaven and drew her quivering soul upward to a purer air. Then the impulse came to her to write a letter which should convey to Tom her wishes for his happiness—wishes wholly honest now.

She lingered over it for some time. She

began it, "Dear Tom." Then she bethought herself of propriety, and began over again, and wrote:

"DEAR MR. RHODES: I have just chanced to see in a Denver paper the announcement of your marriage. Oddly enough, just before it came to me, I had been especially thinking about you. I am thirty years old this day, and it seems natural that my thoughts should be busy with my youth, which, I somehow feel, ends with to-day, and of which, until you went away, you were a part. For you, a new life is just beginning. Mine is but the same old story; only it seems as if the rest of it would be what they call in books an 'appendix.' I write this letter to wish you joy and peace and all that your heart most craves.

"I think I know you well enough to be sure that you would not have married without love, and love is the greatest thing in the world. May all its fullness and blessedness be yours, now and in the time to come,—so prays the friend of your earlier years.

"ELEANOR GRAY."

She addressed this letter to "Thomas Rhodes, care of John Riding, Esq., Denver, Colorado." She sealed and posted it, and then the thirty-year-old young woman felt that she had indeed turned the last page of her youth, and the "appendix" of her life was already begun.

It was not long after this that a newcomer to the quiet old town of Ryefield made Miss Gray's acquaintance. Here at last—so it seemed—came the veritable knight of romance of whom Eleanor had dreamed. Austin Bland was poet and painter both; one glory was not enough for him. He had come to the little Connecticut town to paint some of its beguiling bits of stream and meadow-land, some of its famous old trees that seemed fairly human, they had lived so long and were so full of wayward individuality. His pictures, he said, were for sale; his poems, on the other hand, were not the property of the world. He supposed it was unfortunate, but the truth was, he was utterly subjective. His verses, such as they were, were the very cry of his heart; and

surely they did not belong in the market-place!

From the first Bland seemed to take an especial interest in Eleanor. Naturally this interest flattered her. It had been many years since any man had so persistently sought her society, and now, here in her "appendix" of life, came the conquering hero, ready to turn subject for her sake, eager to paint her charms and to sing her praises. Was it, then, for him that she had unconsciously been waiting, and was it when she was past thirty that she was really to begin to live? It seemed so, just at first.

Bland had brought one or two good letters,—for even in rural Ryefield letters were necessary,—and he had met Eleanor at a high tea at the rectory, the very first week after his arrival. It was the glorious mid-summer—the long golden days when the sun seems so in love with earth that he sets reluctantly; when all the world is at its best, and the birds sing its praises, and the butterflies flutter lazily about as if to see in what a beautiful sphere they are allowed to

pass their little day. There were soft mists at evening in the valley of the Quinebaug—mists that followed the splendor of the setting sun, and fled before the rising moon.

Austin Bland never tired of saying how

infinitely precious it all was. Sometimes he studied the trees, and sometimes he studied Eleanor. He sketched her as Cleopatra, whom she certainly did not resemble; as Iseult, whom she might have been; as, fair Rosamond with the fatal cup in her hand; as herself, in a score of attitudes. He wrote

verses to her in French metres—rondeaux, triolets and ballades; and these, he told her, were for her only—that cry of his heart which none other than herself must hear. It was all so delightfully romantic that Eleanor began to think she was quite sufficiently in love with him, though love was somehow a less strenuous and exciting emotion than she had hitherto supposed. She was rather glad sometimes to be left alone at the close of an afternoon of art and of romance. Of course this was because she was thirty. There could be no doubt that it was the right thing—this high-bred passion that wooed her with all the resources of art. Bland had not spoken of the future, but that must be because he was too delicately reserved to approach her rashly.

At last there came a July twilight. Bland and Eleanor had been watching the sunset together. He had been talking about his theories of sunset effects. He was always talking about his theories; they were for him the one significant and sufficient theme. Then, when the sun had fairly gone out of

sight, Bland got up to depart also, and stood for a moment looking thoughtfully at Eleanor.

"I must see you to-morrow," he said. "Shall it be at three o'clock? I have something to say to you."

"Yes; at three, if you will," she answered; and then he was gone, and she sat musing in the waning light. Of course he was coming to ask her to be his wife. His whole manner had expressed his intention. She was as certain of it as if he had already spoken. Why was she not more exultant? Why did she always feel just a little tired when they had been for some hours together? Of course it would be a glorious destiny to be what he had called her—the queen of his art, to share his ambitions, to be the confidant of his dreams. She ought surely to be grateful to fate, and surely she was. At thirty, no doubt, the time for ecstasy is past. She looked out into the vague distance, and saw some one walking toward her under the trees that fringed the highway. There seemed something familiar in the coming

figure. She caught her breath quickly. Were her eyes deceiving her? No; it was —it absolutely was—Tom Rhodes! As one in a dream, she got up and moved forward to meet him; for he had turned in at the gate now.

She seemed hardly to know what strange thing stirred in her thirty-year-old heart when he took her hand in a strong, close clasp.

"You, Tom?" she cried, "you?"

"Yes, Eleanor; the same old Tom."

"And your wife? Where is she?"

"Here, darling, if only I can win her."

"What!"

"Yes. I am not Thomas J. Rhodes. He is my second cousin; from Connecticut also, but from quite another part of the State. I am Thomas Rhodes, at your service—the same Tom who loved you years ago, and has never thought of marrying any other woman. You made me feel, in the old days, that it would be of no use to speak to you, and so I went away. But when I got your letter, and knew that you were Eleanor Gray still, I re-

solved that if I did not win you, it should not be because I was too cowardly to ask. At least you have a right to know how long and well I have loved you. I have done no great things; I am neither hero nor poet nor statesman; but I have lived a clean, honest life, and there is not one page of it I am ashamed that you should read."

"You loved me—me—all this time?" she cried; and there was a little choking quiver in her voice.

"Yes," he answered solemnly; "I loved you, and you only, then and now and always; but you have not answered me yet, darling."

"Oh, I forgot that; but you know, don't you?"

And indeed Tom knew; for the eyes that looked into his lit the growing dusk with their great light of joy, and the lips that had been strangers hitherto to a lover's kiss yielded themselves to his once and forever. Eleanor was won.

After all, thirty was not old age. These two found that they were young enough still for ecstasy. The moon came up in the east

and looked at them curiously. Yes, they were certainly lovers. The moon has got used to lovers, for she is nearly six thousand years old; and she is not likely to make a mistake. Eleanor wondered that she could ever have fancied herself too old for joy. She wondered yet more that she had not known from the very first that it was Tom, and Tom only, to whom she belonged.

At last she told him about Austin Bland.

"I have been trying all summer to love him," she said frankly. "I thought it was the thing to do; but I had got a little tired of trying. He is coming to see me at three o'clock to-morrow, because he has something important to say to me."

Tom laughed as a successful man may.

"Well, I shall be away just then. I am going to Boston to get a ring wherewith to fetter you to good faith. Deal gently with the erring. I shall be back by the seven-o'clock train to console you for his loss."

The next afternoon Austin Bland was punctual. He came as one who wears the willow. Sadness was in his voice and on his

brow. A weed on his hat would not more clearly have emphasized him for sorrow's own.

"I go," he said; "I go this very night from you who are the queen of my art, and I must never see your too fair face again."

"What!" cried Eleanor, startled for once from her stronghold of composure.

"No, never! I am to be married next month to some one who loves me—but ah, she is not you! I have let myself forget all in the supreme joy of your presence; but I must forget no longer. Pity me! You can afford me so much grace. Circe, I dare not drink your cup."

It was really quite a masterly exhibition of histrionic power. It was hard-hearted and ungrateful of Eleanor to smile at it, as I am afraid I am bound to confess that she did.

"I am to be married almost as soon as you are," she said amiably, "to Mr. Tom Rhodes, one of the owners of the Wheel of Fire mine. But do not let us lose sight of each other. Your sketches of Ryefield scenery are quite too lovely. I should like to give you an

order for some of them, that in far-off Colorado I may not altogether feel bereaved of the old home."

"You are only too good—too good and kind," Austin Bland said mournfully; "but ah, I must really never see you again. Goupil & Co. are my agents. Farewell, queen of my summer!"

And he made his exit, this knight of the sorrowful countenance, after the most approved theories of romance. At half-past seven o'clock Eleanor told her little tale of the afternoon to Tom Rhodes; and then she said, with a laugh, "So you see I could n't have had him, after all; you are only Hobson's choice."

"No, thank God! I am Eleanor's."

NEIGHBOR KING

BY

COLLINS SHACKELFORD

NEIGHBOR KING

WHEN my husband, Micah Tyncheon, died, he left me alone with our baby girl, the farm, an' the grasshoppers. It happened in Kansas, in '76.

You don't mind my crying, now, do you? 'T seems as though I 'd never get the tears all out of me. The time ain't so far away, nor me so old, but that those days spread out before me like a panorama, nat'ral as life. I can feel that hot summer sun, not a cloud in the sky, an' the smell of the bakin' earth movin' all the time in waves of heat until you got dizzy with the motion an' the scent. An' the grasshoppers! You can't know how they came a-flyin' by day an' by night in great

brown clouds; how they crept an' crawled an' squirmed through the wheat an' the corn an' the grass, bitin' an' chewin' every green thing, leavin' nothin' but black an' dry shreds, an' the earth more desolate than if a fire had swept over it. They were everywhere out of doors; they came into the house,—down the chimney when they could n't get in through the door,—an' I 've picked their bony bodies out of my pockets many a time, an' knocked 'em off the table so as I might put down a dish. If you killed one, a thousand came to the funeral. All day an' all night you heard the click, click, click of their bodies as they walked about, jumped here an' there, or rubbed against one another. An' poor Micah's body under the blanket—they were all about it, an' I havin' to brush 'em away. Anybody would 'a' cried if they 'd been in my place, such a dreary day was that—me an' baby all alone, with the village ten miles off, an' not a soul nearer than neighbor King, three miles away.

Seems to me I don't know how Micah died, it was all so sudden like. All day he 'd been

out in the sun a-fightin' the hoppers, an' tryin' to work when he was n't fightin'; an' he came in with his head a-hangin' forward, an' not a smile on his lips as he put up his hat an' rolled down his sleeves.

"I 'm downright discouraged, Miranda," he said at last, lookin' out of the window. "There 's no use in standin' up ag'in' natur' an' the hoppers. They eat faster 'n I can kill 'em, an' in a week the crops 'ull be about all gone. It looks as though when winter comes we won't have anythin' to eat. I b'lieve I 've killed ten thousand of those creatures to-day, an' yet they came faster 'n drops in a rain-storm."

Then he picked up little Hannah, an' lay down on the bed with her in his arms, sayin' no more. I bustled round—speakin' nothing, an' as quiet as possible, knowin' how tired in mind an' body the poor man was—an' fixed up a nice supper. When the table was all set, an' the food on it, an' everything as cheerful an' encouragin' as the hoppers would let me make it, I called Micah. But he did n't answer. So I stepped across the

room, an' put my hand on his face so as to wake him gently, as I was used to doin'.

Oh, dear! oh, dear! The loved face was cold and white, an' I give one scream, an' fell beside him, knowin' nothin'. Yes, Micah was dead—gone to sleep, never to waken, passed from life with little Hannah snuggled in his arms.

No wonder I cry when I remember that lonesome night, holdin' the little one in my arms, an' watchin' the still face on the bed, knowin' that nevermore those eyes would look into mine, nevermore those cold lips would speak to me. An' when the mornin' came, gray an' hopeless, there was no one but me an' the baby an' poor Micah's body; an' the hoppers a-creepin' an' a-crawlin' all through the house as if they were a-buyin' of it at auction, a-rustlin' their wings an' a-hustlin' their bodies until I thought there was a cool wind instead of a hot, breathless mornin'. I covered up the dear face, an', kneelin' by his side, prayed an' cried, an' cried an' prayed. It was all I could do for my husband of three years. I don't know what else

I did, what else I thought. I saw nothin', heard nothin', until somebody's hand fell upon my shoulder.

"Why, Mrs. Pyncheon!" was the cry, an' lookin' up through my tears, I saw neighbor King a-standin' by me. "I was goin' up the road," he said, "an' thought I 'd stop an' say good mornin'. Where 's Micah? In the field, an' you a-cryin' for lonesomeness?"

I answered nothin', but put up my hand an' pulled back the sheet from the dear, dead face.

"My God!" was all he said; an' he staggered back to a chair, an' sat in it for five minutes without a word, his face in his hands.

"Madam, forgive me! I never dreamed of such a thing," he cried at last, recoverin' himself; "an' when an' how did it happen?"

I told him the story between sobs, breakin' down every few words. Thank Heaven, it was n't a long story, or I should have gone crazy before it was told. He was silent for quite a spell, as if he was a-meditatin' over the situation, lookin' mostly at poor Micah, as if drawin' ideas from the cold lips.

Now, Mrs. Pyncheon!" he said finally, in his solemn voice an' grave, slow way of talkin',—"now, Mrs. Pyncheon, you must trust everythin' to me. You 're beat out. I 've no women folks in my house, as you know; but I 'll ride to town, an' get an old lady, a friend of mine, to come out an' help you through. I 'll see, too, that poor Micah has a coffin an' a minister. Be the brave little woman, Mrs. Pyncheon, that Micah would tell you to be, if he could speak. By sundown I 'll have somebody you can talk to an' who 'll cheer you up better than I can. To-morrow—to-morrow we 'll bury the poor man!"

When he said this it set me to cryin'. Then it was so still that I looked up an' found myself alone. A-down the road was a line of dust, an' I heard the muffled footfalls of neighbor King's horse on his way to the village.

An' "to-morrow we 'll bury him" were words that all that long, lonesome, hot day kept soundin' in my ears, as if some one was callin' 'em out with the tickin' of the clock.

"Bury him"—an' Micah dead only a few hours! I could n't believe it, an' would stop an' listen for his whistle at the barn, his talk to the horses, his rattle at the pump, his footfall at the door, until, crazy with waitin', I 'd go over to the bed, pull back the sheet, an' in the still face read why I should never hear those happy sounds again — never again.

Ah, well! The sun went down at last; the long, dreary day was ended; an' in the twilight came back my good neighbor, with motherly Mrs. Challen—an'—an'—it hurts me even now to tell it—the coffin for Micah. In it those two good people softly placed him, an' all that night I watched its shape between me an' the window.

The next day, in the mornin', under the trees in the little grove across from the house, my Micah was laid to rest forever—placed so that when I looked out of the window or the door I could see the mound of earth between the fence of tree-limbs woven around it, an', seein' it, know that in that spot was buried one who in my young life

was more to me than earth or heaven. I never understood how I got through those

"MRS. CHALLEN HELD ME IN HER ARMS."

two terrible days. I can't remember distinctly. It 's all dream-like, as if in a thin, grayish fog. I know that Mrs. Challen held

me in her arms—for I was a fragile, girlish thing—like a mother; that the minister said words I never heard; that the strange faces of a few farm people from miles away looked at me; that the grasshoppers were under foot, an' in the air, an' even on the coffin; but above all else I recall, movin' among the other people like somebody from another world, the tall, straight form and sad face of neighbor King. It was neighbor King who managed everything, from the minute his hand fell upon my shoulder that mornin' until the last limb was knit into the rough fence around the lonely grave. What would have happened to me without him?

I 'm only a woman,—one of the weak ones, I s'pose,—for I broke down entirely the night after poor Micah was buried. Mrs. Challen said I went crazy: that I 'd kneel down at the side of the bed an' cry as if my heart would break; that again an' again I went to the front door an' looked up an' down the lonely, treeless road, an' then to the back door, where I would call "Micah! Micah!" just as I 'd been used to callin' him to his meals, an'

I 'd listen, with my hand to my ear, to hear him answer. Last of all, worst of all, she said, I went staggerin' across the street, an', pushin' through the rough fence, threw myself upon the grave, an' begged of the great Father to give me back the dead that had been so much to me when he was living. I don't wonder at my losing my head. Micah an' I were both so young, an' we had loved each other so much, as common folks often do, that to lose him was robbin' my life of all its brightness an' sweetness.

The mornin' after the funeral neighbor King was round bright an' early, findin' me red-eyed an' weakly.

"Well, well, Mrs. Pyncheon," he began, in what was for him a cheery voice, "what are we a-goin' to do now besides summin' up a little? Are we goin' to our relations?"

"No, Mr. King," I answered, havin' thought over the matter a little; "no; I 'm goin' to stay here. I have no relation I want to bother. Here 's the place for me an' Hannah. The farm is paid for, an' all I have is here an'

—an' over there"—turnin' my face to the spot where Micah lay. "If the grasshoppers 'ull let me, I 'll stay."

"Quite right, madam; very sensible. But of course, while you can do a good deal, you can't work the farm all alone; that 's impossible. I 've been givin' the matter some thought, an' intend to help you out, if you 'll let me. Suppose we work it on shares? You name my share, ma'am, an' I 'll take care that my men look after the hard work for you. The hoppers won't leave much for this year; but what there is you shall have, an' I 'll get my share for this year out of next year's crops. I 'm glad that suits you. Now, you must not live here alone. One of my men has a sister in the village, a stout, healthy, willin' girl who wants a home. She 'll be glad to come here. I 'll try to superintend affairs for you, if you 're willin', an' make the best of everything. Oh, we 'll keep you in good shape, never fear; but you must n't mind my askin' questions, so that I can get a knowledge of affairs. Now don't

thank me; I 'd rather you would n't. Just keep cheerful, an' as long as we 've got to live, let 's make the best of life."

This was very good from neighbor King—somethin' you would n't expect from such a sad or solemn-lookin' man—a man so quiet, so reserved, appearin' always as if he had some grief of his own, so that he could sympathize with others in misery. He must have been forty years old, for his dark-brown hair was showin' gray around the temples, an' there were deep wrinkles around the corners of his mouth, an' lots of little ones around his deep-sunken brown eyes. It always seemed to me as if he 'd been constructed for a minister or a lawyer, an' stopped halfway as a farmer. He was no half-acre farmer, but a worker of hundreds of acres, an' my little homestead was only a potato-patch alongside of his. The queerest thing about his place was that there was n't a woman on it. All the work, cookin' an' everything, was done by men. Well, girls was scarce in those days an' those parts, an' perhaps that was the reason. Maybe, again,

he was afraid of women, an' did n't want 'em bossin' around his work. I did n't know, an' did n't care. It was no concern of mine. I only knew he was mighty good to me in my affliction—the truest, steadiest, most unselfish friend a forlorn woman could have; an' every night I prayed for that same neighbor King, askin' the Lord to bless him for the goodness an' kindness he had shown to me.

True enough, the grasshoppers did n't leave me much that year—just enough to keep soul and body together, with economy. The pesky things eat everything, from pussly to leaves. I b'lieve they 'd 'a' eaten the green out of the sky if they could 'a' got at it. Why, the earth looked as if the devil had gone over it with a brush of brown paint, missin' a spot here an' there that come up green after the critters had got away. There was only one thing they did n't eat, an' that was themselves—more 's the pity!

Neighbor King (his other name was Horace, I found out afterward) watched my farm matters pretty closely the second year. He tended to my interests before his own, be-

cause, as he said, I was a widow an' must not suffer. There was hardly a day he did not ride over the little farm to see how things were goin', always stopping at the door to have a cheerful talk, or to give me, when comin' from the village, a crumb or two of news of the big world so far away; an' often he left a newspaper, that I might read myself what was a-goin' on. This man did everything, in his grave, soothin' way, to smooth down my sorrow—not to lead me to forget, for that was impossible—an' make the roadway of my life as pleasant as a country lane hedged in with sweet-smellin' flowers an' alive with birds nestlin' and twitterin' among the buds and blossoms. In this quiet, restful, peaceful way neighbor King came, in three years, to build his life into mine, until, thinkin' matters over, I realized that he was necessary to make that life pleasant. I did n't forget poor Micah—how could I? At the same time I felt that I could not go on alone the balance of my life with the hunger in my heart for some one to love an' to love me. An' he? Well, not a word out of

line had been spoken; but I read the change in his eyes, his looks, his manners, in the tones of his voice. Women read where there 's neither print nor writin'. I could n't tell why he should love me, though as women go I was young,—fifteen years younger than he,—an' fair-lookin', an' a worker. I was companionable an' in sympathy with him. Put yourself in my place, an' be the lonesome, forlorn creature I was, an' see if you would n't love the man who put aside the dark clouds an' gave you sunshine to drown despair, an' a cheerful voice instead of silence. Neither of us spoke. It was n't necessary. We understood. An' because of that to me the skies were brighter, an' the earth more beautiful, the days fuller of nature's music, an' there was hope an' quiet joy everywhere.

Ah me! I did n't know it, but behind this sunny life, back of this bit of heaven that came down all around me, was a big black cloud full of storm. I remember well the evenin' it first began to show itself. I saw neighbor King comin' down the road from the village on his pony. He did n't

stop, as was his habit, but cantered by, head down and reins loose. Then, as if he 'd forgotten somethin', he wheeled the horse sharp around, trotted back, threw the bridle over a fence-post, an' came in. I saw somethin' was the matter from the absent-minded way he talked an' by his lookin' mostly at the floor.

Strange, too, he began about crops an' prices. Then he had somethin' to say about the village, and from that to livin' in big cities, an' how such places changes people's natures, makin' women different creatures—more bold, more forgetful of friends, less kindly to their sex than those of the country. An' he said it all as slowly an' softly an' solemnly as those ministers pray who don't think the Lord 's deaf. He seemed to be tryin' to get at somethin' by goin' round it; an' I thought that somethin' was me.

"Neighbor King," I said finally, "you always speak so kindly of women folks that it seems odd to me that you never have a woman on your farm, an' odder still that you 've never married."

"Mrs. Pyncheon,"—his face lightin' up like the sky just before sunrise,—"you an' I are old an' tried friends, an' I know you 'll respect an' keep secret what I 'm going to tell you, an' what, to be plain, I came to tell you. I knew, an' I did n't wonder, that you thought it strange I 'd never married. The Lord only knows how I hunger for a woman's love, a woman's talk, a woman's presence where I can see her. I would give all I am worth if I could take a good woman by the hand as my wife, an' go forth even to begin life over again. Hunger an' thirst are terrible, but they are easily borne in comparison with the hunger an' thirst for a woman's love that I have endured for years. No one can realize my lonesomeness, Mrs. Pyncheon;" an' reachin' out, he caught my hands in his. "I 've been your friend for years. You know it. I believe you 've been mine. Will you continue such when I keep from you a truth I dare not tell, an' give you, in its place, a fact that you must know? I know you to be brave an' strong. You 'll be so now, an' secret, too—for no one here knows what I 'm

goin' to tell you. Mrs. Pyncheon, I am a married man."

I could n't help it, but the news was so sudden an' so startlin' that my hands came away from his with a wrench, an' I drew away, feelin' hurt an' shamed, if not guilty; an' I felt a flush of anger burnin' my cheeks.

"There! there! don't misjudge me, Mrs. Pyncheon. Pity me instead. I 've made no attempt to deceive you. I 've been silent, because I could not talk about a matter that was sad an' sacred. Yes, I 'm married; but" —an' great tears came into his eyes—"my wife has been hopelessly insane for ten years. You buried Micah, and mourned for him, knowin' he was dead. I buried my wife alive. God knows whether I 've grieved for her. She is in an insane asylum. For years I could not break away an' leave her; it seemed so heartless to desert one who had been the joy an' pride of my youth. But the doctor told me that it was death for me if I stayed; that I could not last more than a year goin' on as I 'd been livin'. Now you can understand why I am here, solitary an' hope-

less, without a friend—unless I can call you one?"

"You never had a truer one, neighbor King,"—my heart speakin' out its gratitude. "When I think of what you 've done for me, an' how you 've thought of me, all when the world was the darkest,—why, it seems as if my life was too short in which to say all my prayers for you."

Perhaps I spoke particularly quick an' spirited, an' perhaps my eyes showed more 'n I spoke; for he looked very queerly at me for a minute, his face lightin' up in a way it was unused to, an' then he said: "Thank you, Mrs. Pyncheon; I think I understand. I shall not forget this meetin'. Good-by." An', before I knew what he meant to do, he stooped an' kissed my forehead, an' was out of the house before I could speak.

I was n't angry; I was n't hurt. If the truth was given, I was delighted; for I, too, was hungry an' thirsty for a little love. I was woman enough to know what that kiss meant. At the same time I grieved for the poor man, chained, so to speak, to a crazy

person, bearin' his unseen burden so uncomplainingly, an' doin' godlike work all the year round. But the more I thought over that kiss, the more I realized that between neighbor King an' myself had been suddenly put up a high wall, he on one side, I on the other; an' that in the future I should see him very seldom.

It happened as I thought. Days passed an' neighbor King came not. The thumpety-thump of his pony no longer sounded along the road. Mornin's and evenin's came an' went, an' not a "howdy do" in his pleasant voice. I was n't surprised; I expected as much for a time. Finally, one of the hired men said he 'd gone away. Then I put my lips together in a dogged way, an' settled down to a lonesome life, cheered a little by the prattle of little Hannah, an' kept from rustin' by the farm work. I was lonesome, very lonesome, when the evenin' shadows crept over the ground, an' the crickets began to sing, the katydids to scold, an' the hoot-owl to give his mournful cry over in the grove where Micah lay.

There was daybreak at last, though nearly a month after neighbor King had gone. One of his men brought me a letter,—the first I'd had for years,—an' I looked at it a long time before I opened it, wondering what strange news it had for me to know, why I should have it, an' what I should do with it now it had come. I knew the writin'; it was neighbor King's. Was it good news, or news to shrivel my heart up as with fire? I tore off an end an' pulled out the sheet. It did n't take long to read it.

"CHICAGO, August 17, 187–.

"MRS. PYNCHEON: I find that my wife has been dead a year.

"HORACE KING."

The letter dropped from my hand. It was the heartbreaking end of a love-story—the closin' up of one of those little tragedies which the world seldom hears about. Such love-stories are happening all the while among poor people, an' so are too common for the way-up world; yet they are full of heartaches, an' hot, droppin' tears, an' great

sobs that are like moans. An' so my neighbor King had come to the end of his tragedy, had found the idol of his young life an' love put away in her grave, an' the waitin' an' hopin' was at an end. What that good man must have suffered durin' those ten long years, nobody but himself could know. Now that he was free, possibly he would sell his farm an' go back to the city to live; an' I, to whom he had been so good an' grand, would soon be forgotten. Ah, that was a bitin' thought! It almost crazed me, now that I knew how much I loved him, to think of being left alone, to grow old an' wrinkled an' withered, an' no words of comfort to cheer me up along the path walked by nobody but myself. I knew he was too great a man to plow his talents into the soil, or to hide the light of his intellect in the jungles of his fields of wheat or corn. That letter made me feel, somehow, that everything was suddenly changed—that my little world was not the same as it had been ten minutes before. The tears came into my eyes, an' I 'm not sure but I was sobbin' under a forlorn, lone-

some feelin' when I heard a step behind me, an' before I could put away the letter or wipe my eyes, a hand was softly laid upon my shoulder. I sprang to my feet, too frightened to speak. Instantly there was an arm around my neck an' a kiss upon my cheek, an' I heard neighbor King say, with a happy laugh, "It 's only me, Miranda. I find I 'm here as soon as my letter."

"I thought you might not be comin' back," I whispered with quiverin' lips.

"Why, my darling, I 've come back for you," he said, bendin' over an' kissin' me again. "Did n't you understand me when I was here last?"

"I thought I did, but was n't sure. The kiss was a sort of mystery. But it 's all plain now, an' I 'm so happy;" an' like a little fool, was off to cryin' again, this time for gladness, an' he a-holdin' me close in his arms.

This may not read like much of a love-story, yet it was a bitter story for me, all in all, during the years from Micah's death to the golden mornin' that brought such sweet

relief an' rest. The thought troubles me now an' then, but I don't believe that Micah, if he sees from the other world what I 've done, blames me for the change. He knows I can't forget him, an' would not if I could.

Through months an' years of loneliness, of heartaches, of hopin' an' expectin', of draggin' along for no particular purpose save to keep body an' soul together, with few joys an' but little else than sighin', an' the great world made no more for me than a little farm, a little house, an' a voiceless sky above me—what blame, then, have I, if I brightened an' happified my life an' his my makin' neighbor King my husband?

A FELINE FATE

BY

ANNA ROBESON BROWN

A FELINE FATE

BECAUSE the night was bitterly cold, and sleet was falling in thin, sharp lines, Dick Eaton put on his heavy overcoat, in which everything was fur-lined, even to the pockets, before starting for Mrs. Leighton's dinner.

He was not feeling particularly happy, although he was in general a happy-hearted fellow enough. When one is twenty-eight, and has just received a severe snub from one's lady-love, one does not contemplate a long, dreary dinner with much satisfaction. Dick certainly did not. He would much rather have stayed at home and nursed his woes over a bright fire, a volume of Dumas,

and a pipe. However, as this was not to be, he did not grumble, but only gave a sigh or two at the fate which allotted that his heart should have flown away before he was aware of it, and without any prospect of its acceptance.

It cannot be denied that it was Dick's own fault. He had chosen to fall in love with a very superior person—with a girl of wit as well as beauty; with a young lady who had seen and traveled much, who barely tolerated the average young man, and who, as she counted among her friends many prominent people, could afford to pick and choose. It was not to be expected that Lilian Girton, an honored guest in Upper Bohemia, privileged to act as a hostess to scores of well-known people, should have any time to waste on Dick Eaton. It was nothing to her that he persistently and furtively adored her, that he had done so from the first week of their meeting two years ago, and less than nothing that he was possessed of a considerable income. The Girton money made this latter fact of no consequence; and Dick himself—well, Dick

was not clever. He did not write, nor sing, nor act; he was not esthetic, musical, nor socialistic. He was only a big, strong, tender-hearted fellow, pure in soul and sunny of temper, from whose armor of proof the temptations of modern life rolled like water from a duck's back. He had never done a mean action nor told a slanderous story. He was generous of heart, lavish of hand, and had a weakness for animals. His habits were temperate, but not rigid. He drank a little, played poker—a little, and was not above making a bet. He was so straightforward and pure-minded and innately chivalrous that some of his friends had called him "Sir Galahad"—behind his back, of course. Dick would not have known what they meant. Indeed, it is to be doubted if Dick had ever heard of Sir Galahad. Dick's mental acquirements were rather slim, it must be confessed. He read Shakspere and Macaulay, and Thackeray and Dumas, and he was fond of Wilkie Collins. He had no taste for Buddhism, and thought theosophy was "tommy rot." He did not know a thing about Ibsen, and had

never heard of Mr. George Meredith; from which it may be inferred that in Miss Girton's eyes he was a highly commonplace and objectionable young man. Nevertheless, in despite of snubs, sarcasm, and ill-concealed indifference, Dick adored Miss Girton—loved her with a single-souled passion which colored all his life and dominated all his thoughts; which made him her knight, whether she would or no.

It is not quite certain whether Miss Girton was aware of this fact; certainly all of Dick's friends were, and they were for the most part very sympathetic, and sang his praises all day long, much to her astonishment.

"I cannot understand," she said, "what it is that makes that young Eaton fellow so popular. He has n't an ounce of brains; but, to hear his friends talk, one would think he had the mental powers of a Bismarck."

This state of affairs did not tend to make her any kindlier to him. She was always out when he called, or else some celebrity came in, and Dick was left enshrouded in outer darkness during the brilliancy of their con-

versation. So it happened that on this particular evening he was feeling downcast and, for once, discouraged.

It was cold and wet and slippery. The sleet was fine, with a penetrating quality, and it clung to door-posts or froze on window-panes until there seemed no warmth nor dryness anywhere. The wind was gusty; it blew the sleet into Dick's face; and the streets were uncomfortably glassy on pavements and mushy at crossings. He stumped along, with the collar of his coat turned up about his ears, feeling that wind and weather had conspired together against his comfort, and growing less inclined for the chilly formality of a dinner at every step. Half the distance, perhaps, had been traversed, and the last bad crossing waded through successfully, when he felt something brush against his foot and stick fine points into his trousers. At the same time there came a piteous mew. The night was dark as pitch, and the sleet dimmed the windy lamp at the corner; so Dick stopped, and felt down his trousers-leg until his gloved fingers came

in contact with a ball of shivering wet fur, which offered no resistance when he raised it.

It was a kitten,—a very weak, very wet, and very miserable kitten,—from the drenched hair on its little gray head to the tip of its shivering tail, the incarnation of helpless misery. It lay passively, sprawled over his hands, and looking at him with blinking green eyes, far too cold and uncomfortable to be frightened.

"Hello, old man," said Dick, staring at it, at the draggled, helpless paws and the thin rough coat. "Where do you belong?"

The kitten naturally made no answer, but continued to blink at Dick and to shiver helplessly. It was so very small that it staggered and slid about when it tried to stand; so it finally gave up trying, and subsided into an indeterminate heap.

"Well, I 'm awfully sorry, but I can't help it, you know," Dick said, half apologetically. "Run home to your mama. You 're far too little to be out alone."

He set it down on the pavement again; but

it only crouched there, mewing, and when he moved away sprang feebly up his leg, and clung there till he could bear it no longer. He was fond of cats, and this one was so very tiny and abject and wretched, he could not abandon it. He lifted it again, and rubbed the rough fur for dryness, and then tickled it gently under the chin and behind the ears, while the kitten sat on his arm, and held its head first to one side and then to the other, as if it enjoyed the process. Then it backed down into the palm of his hand, and there curled up, sticking its head into the fur cuff of his sleeve. There was evidently no use trying to get rid of it, and, after all, Dick could not abandon the little creature which had fled so confidently to him for protection.

"Well, you are cool," he said, stroking the soft little head; "but I say, old man, what am I to do with you, you know?"

The kitten offered no solution of this problem beyond an attempt to purr—a very weak, hoarse purr, to be sure, but an achievement of which it was evidently not a little proud. The purr settled it. Dick was soft-

hearted, and half conquered already. As he looked about him in despair, he caught sight of the red light swinging in front of Briggs's grocery store at the corner, and he remembered that Briggs kept a bull-dog who liked kittens to play with, and who usually mangled one a week. Meanwhile it was growing late, and Dick was freezing, two circumstances which added weight to the situation. There was nothing to be done for it but to take the kitten along. Abandon it he would not; find it shelter he could not; the only course left was to take it with him. Once at the Leightons', he could decide what to do with his troublesome charge; meanwhile—

"Well," said Dick, resignedly, striding on, "I suppose you have got to come; only, old man, I must say I wish you had chosen to favor me on my way home."

And the kitten gave a jubilant burst of purr which sounded apologetic.

Dick transferred it to his pocket, which, as it was a very small kitten indeed, was very roomy quarters. The kitten smelled all over

it carefully first, and then tied itself into a tight bunch and proceeded to make its toilet; while Dick walked briskly on, chuckling to himself sometimes at the oddity of his position, and yet reflecting on his situation with some anxiety.

As he drew near the house he grew more and more perplexed. He simply could not produce the beast upon entering Mrs. Leighton's parlors; the effect would be too ridiculous, and Dick was foolish enough to be sensitive to ridicule. Miss Girton was to be there, and he dreaded her laughter; he felt sure that such a proceeding would ruin him forever in her eyes. An able-bodied young man picking up a forlorn alley cat and bringing it with him to a dinner-party—it was quite impossible. And yet, what was to be done? If the animal would stay quietly in his pocket, it might not be so hard to conceal it during the meal, and he would excuse himself as early as possible. The kitten seemed so abject and meek that he felt inclined to try the experiment, trusting to the novelty and warmth for due effect in keeping

it still; yet, at the same time, he could not but acknowledge to himself that there were more risks than one. However, it really seemed the only course to take, and Dick resolved to trust to luck, which had rarely failed him in an emergency.

"Now, old man," he said to the kitten, as they stood on the door-steps, "I have done you a good turn, you know, so I expect you to do me another by lying low and keeping dark. Don't give yourself away, old man, if you love me."

"I 'll put my coat here," he said, hastily, as the butler offered to disencumber him of that garment. He could hear the hum of voices in the drawing-room, and her bright laugh rippled out above the maze of conversations. If he had entertained any idea of producing his prize, it vanished now. He hung his coat carefully in a dark corner, away from the stony-eyed butler and his assistants, and tried to arrange the folds so as to hide the small gray head which peeped inquisitively out over the edge of his pocket.

Meanwhile he petted his prize furtively and conjured it not to betray him.

The kitten appeared acquiescent. It was evidently sleepy, and Dick saw with joy that it had already prepared itself for a nap. He breathed a fervent prayer, gave it a farewell pat, and strode nervously into the drawing-room.

Never was dinner so interminably long. They had allotted him to a vivacious little girl in her first season, and he was far away from Miss Girton's end of the table. That lady sat between the pianist and the newest writer of short stories, and Dick noticed with dull jealousy that she seemed on excellent terms with both. As for him, the specter of his concealed crime rose up before him at every mouthful. The girl who sat next him thought him very queer and absent-minded, for he talked by fits and starts, while every now and then she caught him looking anxiously toward the door.

With the third course came a new torment —how to feed his incubus. That the kitten was starving Dick made do doubt, and the

thought was sufficient to spoil his dinner for him. He felt exceedingly guilty at the thought that he had not provided for it before. Also, the thought that the smell of food might possibly attract the animal from his pocket, and induce it to make its appearance in the dining-room, filled him with apprehension. He looked about him for something to slip into his pocket and convey to it secretly, but the outlook was not promising. To say nothing of the difficulty of transportation, such viands as sweetbreads à la Marengo, chicken with truffles, or Roman punch were hardly the diet any self-respecting cat would select for her offspring, and Dick knew it. He passed three courses in endeavoring to manufacture some plausible excuse for leaving the table, but finally gave up in despair, resolving to wait until the ladies retired to the drawing-room, when the greater freedom that prevailed might aid his purpose.

When cigars had been lighted and chairs pushed back, and when conversation was flowing gently and intermittently, like the

"'MILK!' SAID THE HOST, FORGETTING TO RELIGHT HIS CIGAR."

wine into the glasses, Dick felt his hour had come.

"Leighton," he said, addressing his host with elaborate indifference, "would you—could I—ah, that is—would it be too much trouble to get me a glass of milk?"

An amazed silence fell upon the party at this singular request, and even old Grubbs stopped short in the middle of his longest and most wearisome story.

"Milk!" said the host, forgetting to relight his cigar, and staring at our hero in perplexity.

"Punch," suggested the short-story writer.

"No," said Dick, shaking his head; "just a plain glass of milk, please."

"Certainly, if you want it," said Leighton; "but won't champagne do?"

"Well, you see, the fact is," said Dick, writhing on his chair, "the doctor ordered me after every meal—"

"Oh, of course, if you like," said his host; and the butler brought a large tumbler of milk, and placed it solemnly before Dick on the table, during a rather chilly silence.

Then they all began talking about something else, and only the short-story writer, who sat opposite, kept looking at Dick quizzically now and then. There was no help for it; he was forced to gulp down at least half the glass, which he did with a very bad grace indeed. Meanwhile, how to get away unobserved?

"Leighton," he said, reaching out to straighten a candle-shade, "did I hear you say that Gladstone had been criticised in the 'Times' for that last speech of his?"

"Yes," said Leighton, quite unsuspicious, "and of all the unwarrantable—"

The Radical member of Parliament at the other end of the table had something to say on the subject, and the short-story writer wanted to ask questions. The result was that the men pushed the bottles into the center of the table, squared their elbows, and generally made ready for warfare, and in ten minutes, as Dick had anticipated, were far too deep in politics to observe his movements. He felt quite proud of his finesse, but there was no time for self-rejoicing. With the half-finished glass of milk still in his hand,

he rose and wandered over to the window; then to the buffet for a light; then, quite unobserved, out of the door and down the hall to where his overcoat hung.

The kitten was awake and seemed restless. Dick felt that he was just in time. He held it under one arm, and carefully tilted the glass for it until every drop was gone.

"There, old man," he said, as the little thing rubbed its head caressingly against his sleeve, "you feel better, don't you? Have a cigar after your drink?" It amused him to treat his treasure-trove like an acquaintance. The sound of chairs being pushed about in the dining-room struck him with sudden panic. He spilled the kitten hastily into his pocket again, sped back with the empty glass, and put it on the table with the air of a man who has done his whole duty.

"Humph!" said the short-story writer, wheeling suddenly around, and surveying him suspiciously, "you 're a healthy specimen. Is all your medical regimen on that order, may I ask?"

"No," said Dick, with superb simplicity;

"only a man must look after his health, you know, and I 'm not in condition at all, really."

"You look it," said the short-story writer, sarcastically. "I saw you at the club yesterday, boxing, and the amount of weakness you displayed there alarmed me; it really did. Milk, indeed! Nervous prostration, complicated with heart-disease, is about your case, I fancy."

"I hope it 's not as bad as all that," replied Dick, with the calmness of innocence which would have done credit to Mr. Toole himself; "but there 's no knowing what it may turn out if I 'm not careful."

The short-story writer gave him a sharp look as they passed out of the dining-room together, and then went over and spoke to the French tenor, who had been rather neglected during the political discussion.

Conversation in the drawing-room was not exciting, and Dick grew nervous. Of course the tenor sang, and the pianist played, and the short-story writer told some of the curious things which had fallen to his own or other people's experience; but Dick wanted

to talk to Miss Girton, and found this rather harassing. That lady, however, was in her element; and, as when she was not discussing Ibsen with the critic, she was analyzing Wagner motifs with the pianist or exchanging French compliments with the tenor, he found very little chance to put in his oar. He tried to do his duty, but he eyed her from afar with a heavy heart. He drifted aimlessly about, longing to get away, and yet bound by the irresistible pleasure it gave him merely to look at her.

The drawing-room was heated by a large wood-fire, and it soon became unpleasantly warm; so the people wandered out by twos and threes, some into the music-room, a few into the cool, softly lighted hall. Miss Girton was one of these, and Dick, as a matter of course, joined the group of men gathered around her, and hazarded a remark now and then when they gave him a chance. How lovely she looked, he thought, as she stood there, tall and graceful, in her fawn-colored satin draperies, with her bright eyes and quick, animated movements of head and

hands. The ribbon of her bouquet had become untied, and she rolled it in her fingers and trailed it to and fro over the shining wood floor as she talked.

"It is n't so much the humanity of Ibsen," she was saying; "it 's his perception of our higher being, I think, which gives him so much power over things purely ideal."

Dick wondered, with a sickening sensation of ignorance, what was "a perception of our higher being." Suddenly a thrill of apprehension seized him. There was a stir among the overcoats in a dark corner of the hall; and as he gazed anxiously in that direction, two bright spots met his eyes—two sparks of topaz fire fixed intently on the floor. Oh, that fascinating blue ribbon! How it curved and trailed about! What kitten, even the most staid, could have resisted the temptation?

Dick saw the danger at once. He made a sudden plunge and picked it up off the floor.

"Your ribbon is untied," he said, offering it to Miss Girton with nervous politeness.

"Thank you," she said in some surprise.

She let it dangle from her hand for a minute, and then shook it out in a long curved line on the dark wood. It was too much. No mortal kitten could withstand *that*.

There was a bound and a rush, and the scamper of four soft little paws, and Dick's unfortunate waif lay on its back under Miss Girton's very feet, kicking and clawing at the ribbon in an ecstasy of playful excitement.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Girton, stepping back. "Where did that come from?"

"It 's a cat, by Jove!" said somebody. Then Dick, feeling cold and weak all over, made a step forward.

"It 's mine; I picked it up," he said distinctly. "It was so cold and wet, you know—"

"Did you find it?" "Was it here all the time?" "Where did it come from?" cried everybody, crowding around; while the kitten made short charges at the ribbon, batted at it with its paws, and kicked at it frantically with its hind legs.

Dick told the whole story with a sinking

heart. What would she think of him? What would she say? She did not say anything, but nearly everybody else did. The pianist told a long story about his cat in Leipsic, and the short-story writer clapped Dick on the shoulders. "Come, Eaton, now confess," he cried, laughing. "I spotted something from the first. That milk—?"

"Yes," said Dick, scarlet, but sturdy; "it was for the kitten."

There was a roar of laughter from the men, and then the joke had to be explained to the ladies, and Dick had to tell again how he had managed it.

"And why you did not produce the beast right away," said Leighton, "I cannot understand exactly. By the way," he added, "there 's a smart fox-terrier of mine upstairs. Let 's introduce them and have some fun."

Dick made a dash for his protégé,—who by this time had gotten the ribbon mixed up with its own tail and was trying to swallow both,—and caught it up.

"No, you don't," he said, holding the furry

little head against his chin caressingly. "This little beast 's had quite enough of that sort of thing, I fancy. I 'm going to take it home and make it comfortable. You don't mind living with me, old man?"—this to the kitten. "We 'll be pretty good chums so long as you don't smoke bad tobacco."

He got on his overcoat, and said good-by to his hostess amid a fire of good-natured chaff. Then he looked round for Miss Girton. She was standing alone by the fireplace, twisting the fatal ribbon absently in her fingers, and her face wore a curious expression. Dick, with his prize still cuddled up in his arms, came over to her.

"All that for a kitten?" she said, somewhat irrelevantly. "Why was it?"

"Oh, well, it liked me," said Dick, simply, "and it was so beastly wet, you know."

She gave him her hand with a sudden dazzling smile.

"Won't you come and see me to-morrow?" she said. "I shall be quite alone all the afternoon, and I do so want to hear about—about the kitten."

THE WHIP-HAND

BY

ANN DEVOORE

THE WHIP-HAND

SHE was a stunning girl, straight and slim, with a bewildering way of looking at a man. Her eyes were a warm, thick brown, and their lids as white as cream—the deluding sort of eyes and eyelids that say nothing, and set you to imagining everything. When I had talked to her for five minutes, and she had regarded me with her soft stare for most of that time, my heart went to thumping at my ribs. I must confess I was so much surprised that I clapped my hand to my side and laughed out.

Miss Morris laughed too, and asked, "What is the matter?"

Of course I could not tell her then; but

when I had known her for a month, I asked her if she remembered our first meeting.

"Yes," she said; "what made you start?"

I took her hand and said, "I fell in love with you that minute, dear."

I am a Westerner, and rough and sudden in my ways, I suppose; for she seemed wholly startled, slipped her hand out of mine, and told me never to speak so again.

"Why not?" I asked. "You do not love me, Kitty?"

"No," she said; but her eyes lingered in mine.

"And you will not marry me?"

She refused steadily.

"And I am never again to tell you that I love you?"

"Never," she said.

"Kitty, dear," said I, gently, "you do love me, and you are going to marry me, and I mean to propose to you every time I meet you."

I went then, for she was rather angry. She said something cutting about my Western ways, and shooting a man on sight. But

I kept my word, and at dances and dinners, wherever we met, in spite of her disdain, I always made my speech: "Will you marry me, dear?" After a while, when she caught sight of me across a room the color would spring to her cheeks, and though I knew it was half embarrassment, I could swear the other half was pleasure. She had an obstinate way of tilting her chin when she saw me approach that was very pretty, and made me only the more determined. Besides, she did not absolutely cut me, as she might have done. She would not see me when I called, and if I asked for a dance it was always engaged; but when I said firmly, "This is my dance, Miss Morris," she would not contradict me.

Late one afternoon at the beginning of Lent, when I had not seen her for several days, I overtook her walking home from church, and joined her. She greeted me frigidly, held her prayer-book tight and her head high. I watched the red steal up her cheeks.

Miss Morris," I said. She did not answer.

Ahead of us, where the church spires pierced the cold northern sky, a small star glittered. The faces of the people we met reflected the light of the sunset behind us. I began again. "When you pray," said I, and I looked at her prayer-book, "do you never ask to be made more merciful?"

She turned her soft eyes to me. "Please don't, Mr. Standish," she pleaded. "I cannot bear to have you use words that seem to me sacred to carry on this farce."

"It is anything but a farce" said I. "Call it a tragedy."

"Did any man in earnest ever propose to a girl eleven times in six weeks?" She asked this question scornfully.

"Miss Morris," said I, "it is not my fault that it has been done so often. If you had accepted me at the first—but you refused me, and what else could I do? Am I a fool to try again and again to win what is the best and most beautiful thing I ever set eyes on? How can I stop asking you to marry me until you consent? You must marry me,

dear. I am sure it is the only chance of happiness for either of us."

"There," she said, with an angry laugh, "twelve times! Don't you see, Mr. Standish, that by acting so you make every word you say seem a foolish joke?"

"It is you," I told her, "who can make them all a glad reality."

"Oh!" she cried, "and you pretend it is my fault! Well, it shall never happen again —never, never! You shall not humiliate yourself and me." Her color deepened, and she drew herself up, slender and proud. "Mr. Standish," she said, "I promise you that if ever again I give you an opportunity of speaking so to me, I shall answer whatever you wish."

We reached her home then, and she stopped. So great was my surprise that I merely bowed, and let her ascend the steps in silence.

Life went sadly after that. Try as I would, I could not speak to her. When we passed in the street she was never alone,

and she had taken to looking on one side of me with a sweet, dark-eyed vacancy. There were few entertainments now; and though I haunted her favorite church at the afternoon services, she did not come. She seemed to avoid going to the houses of those friends where she would be likely to meet me. Only once was I able to look at her for more than a passing second. I had taken a ticket for an afternoon concert in the hope of seeing her, and I chanced to sit where I could watch her profile whenever she turned to speak to her companion. She looked a trifle pale and sad. "Perhaps," thought I, "she regrets that her efforts are so successful." That thought, however, was knocked out of me, when we reached the street, by the smiling unrecognition which greeted my eager bow.

Six weeks came and went, but never an opportunity to make her fulfil her promi[illegible] and then she went to Boston for a visit, a[illegible] stayed away a month. I grew hagga[illegible] People told me I must take a run abroad the summer. "Not till I 'm married," s[illegible] I, and gritted my teeth. I believe that

this time my love for Kitty Morris was almost forgotten in my set determination to have my own way.

There came a May morning, fresh and balmy. The horse-chestnuts spread out their green fans, the maples clapped their small palms to the breeze, and the tulips in the trim flower-beds looked primly gaudy. I was walking through Madison Square on my way to business, and hope was stirring in my heart. I suppose it was the general hilarity of nature that had taken hold of me. I did not feel much surprised when a hansom went by, and I saw Kitty Morris inside. It was what the weather had led me to expect. I took joyfully to my heels, and followed. Eastward we went through Twenty-fourth Street and down Second Avenue; and here, in this quiet, old-fashioned thoroughfare, the hansom stopped before an ancient mansion. Kitty had alighted and been engulfed in the interior darkness before I could reach the door; and though I knew that her great-aunt resided within, I remained gazing at the hansom-cab.

Then an idea entered my mind—an idea for which the mad May season was alone accountable. When Miss Morris reëntered the hansom-cab, it was I who received the order to drive home; it was I who cracked the long whip and drove recklessly; it was I who feasted my sight on the top of a broad-brimmed hat, a loop of dark hair, and the tip of a small and haughty nose. I had the trap-door in the top of the cab open all the way.

Trusting in the disguise of the former cabby's hat, which I had hired, I made straight for the park; and when we were rolling smoothly between green lawns, with no one of any account in sight, I bent low and whispered:

"Kitty, dear, will you marry me?"

She started violently, and upturned a white face. I don't know what she thought, seeing my face above her there; but her eyes filled slowly with tears, and she whispered, "Dick!"

"Kitty," I said, "don't cry, or I shall come down from the roof, and here is Mrs. Van Dam's brougham. I would not have fright-

ened you for anything in the world." slowed the horse to a walk, so that I could give my whole attention to the trap-door.

"I have come to claim your promise," I called down to her. "Tell me, dearest, that you are glad to see me."

Her pride seemed to be melting before my eyes. Her tears overflowed, and she held her hands up before her face; but I caught a quavering voice: "I am glad, Dick—so, so glad!"

I dropped the reins, and pressed closer to the little door. "Darling Kitty, if you cry you 'll break my heart," I called. "Be a brave girl. Oh, Kitty, could n't you stretch your hand up and let me touch it once?"

"I—I can't reach," she sobbed.

"Then you do love me?" I asked.

She wiped her eyes. "Dick," she said, "could n't you come down?"

I believe the horse was arrested that afternoon for walking on the grass and eating young trees; but it pleases me to think that while Kitty and I wandered through the sweet paths and blossoming alleys, the poor

beast was tasting green food and resting his tired bones.

There in the early solitude, in the genial sunshine and the unsteady shadows, Kitty confessed to me that she had gone to Boston for fear of weakening in her resolution to avoid me.

"Oh, Dick," she said, "I thought you would never come and take me in spite of myself."

"Kitty," said I, "would you have wrecked our whole lives from pride and self-will? Would you have let me lose you?"

She turned away her head, and blushed. "Dick," she faltered, "this afternoon you will receive an invitation to dine with my aunt; and I—I am to be there Dick."